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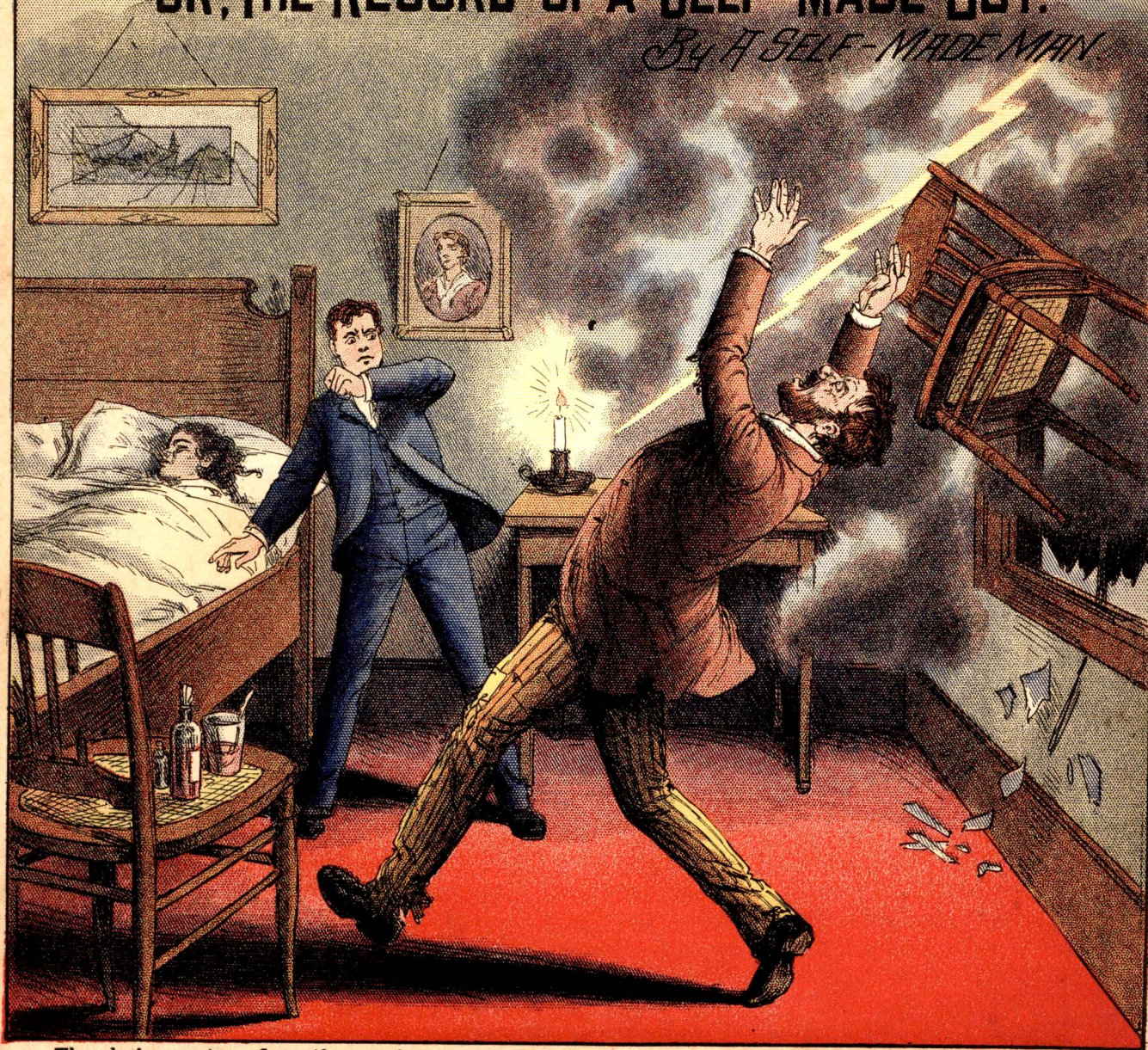
5 CENTS.

FAME & FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF
BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE; OR, THE RECORD OF A SELF-MADE BOY.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



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Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE;

OR,

The Record of a Self-Made Boy.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE LOWEST RUNG OF THE LADDER.

"Now I've got you, you young scamp! Hand over your wages at once, or I'll thump you black and blue!"

The man who uttered these fierce words had just sprung out of a nearby hedge and collared a boy, who had been walking along a lonesome stretch of country road.

He was a big, husky-looking man, with a bloated, unshaven face, and a pair of dark eyes that at the moment shone with a fierce, unnatural light.

His clothes were faded, threadbare, and dirty, patched in a dozen places, and frayed at the wrists and ankles, where they had shrunk until they looked a couple of sizes too small for the wearer.

His bloodshot eyes and his thick speech showed that he was partially intoxicated.

The boy he had grasped by the jacket was a bright, good-looking lad of seventeen, almost as poorly attired as himself.

The look on his face showed that he had been taken by surprise, but for all that was prepared to resist the aggressor to the last.

And these two, sad to relate, were father and son.

"Did you hear what I said?" roared the man, shaking the boy roughly.

"I heard you," replied the youth, doggedly.

"Then cough up—do you hear?" with another shake.

"I've only got three dollars, and you know we need every cent of it at the house, for mother is sick, and this is all we have to live on for the next week," answered the lad, in a tone of indignant remonstrance.

"Well, you can keep one, then; so hand over the other two and I will let you go," his father replied, slightly loosening his grip, as if he expected the boy would now comply with his request.

The lad, however, had no such intention, but instead took immediate advantage of the chance presented to wrench himself free from his father's grasp and spring back a yard out of his reach.

"Confound you, you little monkey!" growled the man, making a dive forward to get hold of the boy again.

But he might have saved himself the trouble.

The boy started across the road with great agility, while his father's feet got all tangled up and he landed in a heap, a truly pitiable object, in the middle of the turnpike.

He pulled himself up into a sitting posture, shook his fist at his son, and used language which caused the lad a shudder of disgust.

"I'll pickle you for this, Bert Hawley!" he roared, in

impotent rage. "Just wait till I catch you at home. I'll beat the very life out of you."

"Father——" began the boy, hesitating to leave his parent in the condition he was.

"Shut up, you little jackanapes!"

"Won't you come home? You know how sick mother is," and the tears welled up in the boy's eyes.

"I'll come home when I get good and ready, do you understand? You're an ungrateful cub. Give me a dollar and I'll let it go at that."

Ned Hawley, once strong, handsome and industrious, now a wreck and slave of the demon rum, blinked at the boy he ought to have loved and encouraged in his efforts to support a weak and dying mother and a now worthless father.

But shame or repentance was not in the miserable man's line.

He had sunk too low to be moved by any worthy consideration.

What he wanted most of all at that moment was liquor. His debauched appetite craved the stimulant.

He could not get it without money, for his credit was gone at the village rumshop, and he was indifferent if his wife and son starved through the loss of the three dollars he knew his son was bringing home that afternoon, and which he coveted.

He would have half killed the boy there and then, could he have got him once more into his clutches, if there was no other way of getting the money from him.

Poor Bert's lot at that moment was not one to be envied.

"No," said the boy, shaking his head decidedly; "you want to spend it for liquor. I'll never give you a cent for that purpose."

"Won't you?" roared his father, staggering to his feet. "I'll see whether you won't."

He picked up a big stone out of the dust and threw it vengefully at the lad's head.

The missile missed Bert by a hair.

Had it landed as intended by the drunken wretch the boy would really have been fatally injured.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, father," said Bert, in indignant surprise.

"Are you going to give me that money?"

"No."

Ed Hawley reached for another stone.

That settled the matter with Bert, who turned and made off down the road as fast as he could go, pursued by several stones, which, however, went wide of their mark.

The village of Jayville was close at hand, through which he would have to pass on his way to the miserable dwelling he called home.

He intended to stop at the drugstore to get some medicine the doctor had ordered for his mother, who was in the last stages of consumption, aggravated by lack of proper nourishment, as well as by the cruel neglect and harsh conduct of her husband.

"I'll have to get a hustle on," murmured the boy, as the

mutterings of distant thunder struck upon his ears, "or I'll catch a shower bath before I get home."

He soon struck the tree-shadowed main street of the village.

In a few minutes he entered the drugstore.

"Hello, Bert," said the druggist, coming forward; "what can I do for you?"

"I want this prescription filled," said the boy, tendering him the slip of paper the doctor had left with him that morning.

"How is your mother—any better?" asked the pharmacist, taking the slip and glancing over it.

Bert shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the man, sympathetically, for Mrs. Hawley was well liked through out the neighborhood.

Her unassuming personality and sweet disposition, as well as her many kindly deeds in the past, had not been forgotten by those who rarely, if ever, saw her now.

"It will take me a quarter of an hour to put this up," said the druggist.

"I will be back by that time. I have a few things to buy."

Bert went over to Mr. Bentley's, the butcher, and purchased a small chicken.

Then he went down to the general store on the corner and bought some tea, sugar, and a few other necessities.

As he was leaving the store a well-dressed boy of sixteen, with a not overagreeable face, ran into him at the doorway, dislodging one of his packages, which fell to the floor in the newcomer's path.

"Who are you butting into, you pauper!" snarled the dudish boy, whose name was Jonas Potts. "Can't you see what you're doing?"

Then he deliberately kicked the package across the floor.

The paper split open, and a pound of sugar was mixed with the sawdust.

"Shame on you, Jonas!" cried a girlish voice at this juncture.

A handsomely-dressed miss of fifteen, his sister Helen, had followed Master Potts into the store and observed his ungentlemanly conduct.

She was a decidedly pretty girl, with rosy cheeks, whose color was now heightened by the indignant flush which overspread her features.

"Oh, what's the matter with you?" retorted her brother roughly, as he turned on his heel, marched over to the counter and called for a package of cigarettes, one of which he speedily lighted and then turned to regard Bert Hawley with a sneer of contempt.

"I am very sorry that my brother should act so rudely to you, Bert," said Helen Potts. "He is a headstrong, wilful boy, and I am often ashamed of his conduct. You shall not lose your sugar. I know you cannot afford it."

"Never mind, Miss Helen. I can buy another pound. It was perhaps my fault that I got in his way; but I did not see him coming."

"Of course you didn't. How could you, with all those

packages? Mr. Tarbox," she said, turning to the clerk who had waited on Jonas, "put up a couple of pounds of sugar for Bert Hawley. My brother will pay you for it."

"I will like fun!" snorted Jonas Potts, with an angry frown.

"If you won't, I will; and I'll tell mother just as soon as I get home," replied the girl, spiritedly.

"I'd rather you would let me pay for it, Miss Helen," broke in Bert, earnestly.

"No, Bert; that certainly wouldn't be fair. Jonas has no right to make a football of your package. Had he left it where it fell the damage would not have occurred."

Helen Potts took the bundle of sugar from the clerk and carefully placed it on Bert's arm.

"How is your mother to-day?"

"She was feeling very ill this morning when I went away."

"I am sorry to hear that," replied the girl, with a look of sympathetic interest. "I will call to see her to-morrow. If there is anything mother or I can do for her you must let us know."

"Thank you, Miss Helen. You are very kind to say so. I am afraid mother won't last long," and the boy choked back a sob, while his eyes were suffused with tears.

"I am so sorry, Bert," answered Helen, laying one hand on the boy's arm almost caressingly, a mute expression of her girlish sympathy.

Jonas puffed his cigarette and regarded the pair with scornful indifference.

"Sis makes me tired," he sniffed to Tarbox, the clerk. "What she can see in that beggar I can't imagine. Look at his rags! Why, our scarecrows are rigged out better."

This comparison brought a grin of malicious satisfaction to his face.

"Are you going to settle for that sugar," asked the clerk, "or will Miss Helen?"

"I suppose I'll have to," replied Jonas, tossing a quarter on the counter; "but I hate to do it, all right. If I refused sis would make a fuss at the house. However, I'll make it my business to get square with him for it at the first chance," and he bent an evil glance at Bert.

"If I only had a sister like you, Miss Helen, I think I shouldn't feel quite so sad and dispirited at times," said Bert, with a wistful look into the girl's face. "She'd be such a comfort to mother. I shall never forget you as long as I live. Although you're rich, you've never looked down on us like the rest of the people have done since we got so poor. I may say you've been mother's truest friend right along, and she never forgets you in her prayers. And now good-bye. There's a storm coming up, and I must get home as soon as I can."

"Good-bye, Bert. Remember I am your friend, as well as your mother's."

She pressed the boy's hand and gave him a look he never forgot from that day.

CHAPTER II.

ALMOST A MURDER.

Half an hour later, just as the first heavy drops of rain that heralded the approaching thunderstorm began to fall, Bert Hawley pushed open the dilapidated gate that led to the miserable-looking cottage which once upon a time had been a bright and happy home.

Ten years previous that desolate place had been the well-furnished, comfortable home of Edward Hawley, carpenter and builder.

He was then prosperous, and respected throughout the neighborhood.

In those days he had his half dozen acres of ground, his four cows, his horse and wagon, as well as his pigs and poultry.

But misfortune overtook him.

He was laid up with a severe attack of malarial fever.

Then, of his three children, to whom he was devoted, two were carried to the village churchyard.

His cottage and a bit of garden were his only property, but his six acres of meadow land were rented from Lemuel Potts, lawyer and justice of the peace.

Hawley, who had pretty well managed the six acres by his own labor, was obliged, by his illness, to hire a farm-hand.

The fellow proved to be indolent and careless, for there was no one to keep tab on his movements; and the result was no one to keep tab on his movements; and the result heavy expenses of the illness and funeral expenses of his two children, his own sickness and the cost of living, had been compelled to use up all of his savings, and finally to sell two of his cows.

It is possible that some of the long conversations which Rake, the farmhand, held with Farmer Whiteacre—whose fields adjoined the six acres, and who greatly longed to add Hawley's little bit of ground to his large farm—caused his neglect of his work.

Farmer Whiteacre offered Lawyer Potts a good price for the six acres, if he could manage to cancel Hawley's lease, which had three years to run.

While Hawley was still confined to the cottage Lemuel Potts came to see him. He offered him a sum of money and, as a further inducement, the appointment of constable of the county, for his lease of the land.

Hawley took great offence at the proposition.

His run of hard luck seemed to have changed him from a cheerful and contented man to an irritable and morose one.

He had treated Lawyer Potts with unnecessary violence on the occasion of his visit, and finally ordered him from the cottage.

Thus he made an enemy of a man whose influence in the neighborhood was not inconsiderable.

When Ed Hawley got well again he found it almost impossible to secure work at his trade.

The cause of this he traced by degrees to Lemuel Potts. When he discovered that the adverse impression abroad was more than he could overcome he grew sullen and disagreeable, and began to frequent the rumshop in the village.

From that hour his fall was rapid, and misfortunes accumulated around his family.

Unable to pay his rent, he forfeited his lease of the six acres, and the land was speedily sold to Farmer Whiteacre.

All that was left to him was his cottage and a small patch of ground, which nobody would purchase, and that gradually went to ruin and decay.

Then his wife became a prey to slow consumption.

All they had had to live on during the past few months was what Bert, the manly son of the house, managed to earn by working on the neighboring farms; and a good part of this money Hawley obtained, either by persuasion or threats, only to squander it at the rumshop.

Bert, fortunately, had had a good education before his father went to the bad; and he was also a good talker.

The poor boy, who always maintained a cheerful demeanor before his mother—whom he loved all the more tenderly because of his father's heartlessness—felt that affairs were fast coming to a crisis.

She could scarcely survive much longer.

The ravages of the disease, which had wasted her to a mere shadow—combined with grief caused by her husband's disgraceful conduct—were producing their inevitable results.

When Bert entered the cottage he found his mother alone, dozing on a bed which had been put up for her in the front room, once the parlor.

The upper story had been rendered almost uninhabitable by the dilapidated roof which, no effort having been made to repair it, permitted free entrance in many places to the wind and rain.

A kindly-disposed neighbor had kept the poor woman company for the greater part of the day, but had gone home to avoid the storm.

Bert found some tea and the remains of a bowl of gruel warming on the stove.

He replenished the fire, cut up the chicken and put it in the pot to make broth.

The necessity of making himself useful around the kitchen had made the boy something of a cook in a small way.

By the time he had everything under way the storm swooped down on the cottage with a rush, blotting out the landscape with a veil of driving rain.

The lightning made glaring rifts in the gathering darkness, while the thunder crashed overhead with ever-increasing intensity.

Bert made a pot of fresh tea and toasted a slice of bread left over from the previous day; then he softly stole into the parlor to see if his mother was awake.

He found she was.

She greeted his appearance with a wan smile.

"When did you get home, Bert?" she asked feebly.

"Nearly an hour ago, mother. How do you feel?" he added, anxiously.

"Very weak, my boy," she answered, slowly raising one of her thin hands and softly stroking his hair and face with a pathetic wistfulness that choked the boy with a sudden sensation of grief.

Mrs. Hawley saw the tears welling in his eyes.

"Don't cry, Bert, dear," she whispered affectionately.

"I can't help it, mother. You are all I have to love."

His feelings overpowered him, and he laid his head on the edge of the pillow and wept silently for a moment or two.

"Where is your father?"

"I do not know, mother."

"You have not seen him since morning?"

"Yes, mother; I met him on my way home from the Risdon farm."

"And he wouldn't come with you?"

Bert made no reply.

"It's a terrible night," murmured the sick woman.

"What a vivid flash that was!" she said, with a frightened look.

A heavy crash of thunder followed, and she buried her head in the pillow.

"Don't be alarmed, mother," said Bert, reassuringly, as he stroked her hair tenderly. "It will soon pass away."

"Ever since I was a girl I have been afraid of a thunder-storm," said Mrs. Hawley, with a shudder.

"Try not to think about it, mother. I have made you some chicken broth and a fresh cup of tea. Won't you try some?"

"I have no appetite, Bert."

"But you must eat to keep up your strength," persisted her son.

"Well, you may bring in a little of the broth and a small cup of tea."

The boy hastened to do so.

The only bowl in the house was that which had the gruel, and Bert pressed it into use, together with a cracked cup and a chipped saucer for the tea.

He put milk and sugar in the tea, the dry toast on top of the cup, and the whole on a japanned tray which had survived the general wreck.

"Now, Bert, you must get your own supper, while I try to drink the broth and the tea, both of which are very good," she said with a little smile, after tasting them.

Bert reluctantly retired to the kitchen, where he poured himself a cup of tea and picked one of the chicken's drumsticks out of the pot.

A piece of dry bread completed his frugal repast and fully satisfied his appetite, which greatly suffered from the anxious solicitude he felt for his mother.

It was now quite dark, and the electrical storm was central over the cottage.

The uproar without was something terrific.

It was one of the worst thunderstorms which had visited the section in years.

Bert lighted a candle and carried it into the parlor.

The amount of nourishment Mrs. Hawley had taken would scarcely have fed a small sparrow, and the boy noted the fact with increasing alarm.

"You are not eating much, mother," he said, bending down and kissing her tenderly.

"I cannot, Bert! Oh, I am so weak! Why does your father not come home? I dread lest he be out in this storm."

Bert's feelings toward his father at that moment were hardly filial.

The man knew the condition his wife was in, and his son knew that he did; yet the imp of the bottle had more power over him than the ties of family affection.

Shakespeare only spoke the unvarnished truth when he wrote: "Oh, that a man should put an enemy in his mouth to steal away his brains!"

To no man is the curse of liquor so apparent as to the victim of the bottle himself, as he strives vainly to break the chains he so foolishly helped to forge about his will.

"Oh, why does not Edward come home?" moaned the poor woman. "I feel I am dying, my son, and I want him—I want my husband. I want to see him once before my eyes are forever closed to this world."

"Mother, do not say that!" cried Bert, in an agony of grief.

"It is useless for me to disguise the truth from you, Bert," gasped Mrs. Hawley. "I feel I cannot live through this night. I am drifting—drifting away into the unknown. But I cannot die—oh, I cannot until I see Edward again. Once we were so very happy together. The world was so bright, and he was good to me—then. He is your father; I cannot forget that—and you are the only child left to me. But I shall see my other darlings soon. Yes, yes, very soon."

"Mother, mother!"

Flickering and dim as was the light of the candle, Bert noted that dark shadow fall upon his mother's face, which appals those who see it for the first time.

Her eyes, too, were fixed, and seemed gazing into vacancy.

"Look, look, Bert!" she gasped. "Your little brother and sister, Philip and May, they beckon me to come away with them. And oh, they are so bright and fair!"

Then Mrs. Hawley lay silent, while the boy, frantic with silent grief, watched her face with suspended breath.

A brilliant flash of lightning lit up every corner of the room, and then a tremendous peal of thunder shook the cottage to its foundations.

Suddenly a wild, bacchanalian song was borne through the window; then heavy steps sounded through the storm of blinding rain as they crunched the stones of the path leading to the house.

"Edward, my hus——" cried the dying woman, starting up, only to fall back with a rattle in her throat.

As the boy listened with a species of fascinated terror, the kitchen door was banged open with a smash, and the wretched husband and father was heard singing:

"For we're all jolly good fellows,
We're all jolly good (hie) fellows—
We're all jolly good——"

The song was cut short by a sudden fall, as Ed Hawkins went sprawling on the kitchen floor.

Presently he got up and staggered into the room where his wife lay, calm and silent.

"So you've got home, have you, you cantankerous little monkey?" he roared, as his eyes noted the presence of Bert.

"Father, hush!"

"I won't hush! You wouldn't give me that money, and I'm going to lick you for it right now."

"Father, I beg you to be silent. Mother is very bad. I fear she is dying."

"Bah! Don't b'lieve no such rot. Come out of that chair, you little imp—come out, I say."

"You shan't disturb mother!" cried Bert, facing him with flashing eyes. "Nobody but a brute would act as you are doing now."

"I'm a brute, am I, you whelp!" bellowed Hawkins, giving way to uncontrollable rage. "I'll kill you for that!"

He pushed the boy against the corner of the bed as if he had been a feather.

The shock almost stunned Bert so that he was incapable of defending himself.

The infuriated man seized a chair, intending in his blind fury to bring it down on the skull of the defenceless boy.

He swung it aloft and poised it while he took aim, and then——

Then heaven interposed and saved the wretched drunkard from the crime of slaying the last remaining member of his family.

Simultaneous with a deafening crash of thunder directly overhead came a blinding flash of lightning, and an awful shock struck the cottage.

The walls and ceiling seemed to shrivel up and melt away.

The chair was torn from the man's grasp and sent crashing through the kitchen door, while Edward Hawkins himself was stretched stunned and bleeding upon the floor.

The bluish gleam rested a moment on the face of the dead woman in the bed and lit up the terrified countenance of the cowering boy.

Then darkness, seemingly more intense than ever, settled down on the wrecked home, and nothing could be heard but the swish of the rain as the moaning wind whirled it against the crumbling sides of the building.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROJECTED BURGLARY.

The funeral of Mrs. Edward Hawley, the expenses of which were defrayed by a private subscription headed by Lemuel Potts, was largely attended by those who had associated with the dead woman during her days of prosperity.

Bert Hawley was chief mourner, his father being in no condition to be present.

Everybody felt sorry for the boy and had a kind word of encouragement for him—that is, most everybody.

Jonas Potts, we are sorry to say, sneered at Bert's grief on the quiet, and refused to go to the funeral with his father, mother and sister.

Helen Potts, however, made up for her brother's shortcomings.

She sat beside Bert in the ruined parlor of the Hawley cottage, while the minister spoke of the dead woman's virtues and charities, and the afflictions she had borne so many years with Christian resignation.

She stood beside Bert as his mother's body was lowered into her last resting-place, and placed her arms lovingly about his neck when the lad sank on his knees in a paroxysm of grief as the clods of earth struck with a hollow thud upon the box containing the coffin.

At last it was all over.

Bert, declining a polite invitation from Lawyer Potts to spend the afternoon and night at his house, went home with a neighbor who had offered him the shelter of his humble home until the boy had decided what he should do.

Three days passed away, and then Bert informed his kind host that he had determined to leave Jayville and seek a broader field for making his way in the world.

"Where do you expect to go?" asked the friendly farmer curiously.

"I shall strike for Baltimore, which is the nearest big city, and if nothing turns up there I mean to go to Philadelphia or New York."

"Well, I wish you luck, my boy. When do you mean to start?"

"This evening. I'll walk over to Rye Junction and take the late accommodation train for the city."

After dinner Bert went over to the house of one of Ed Hawley's old chums, where his stricken father had been taken the night of his wife's death.

"Your father went away after breakfast this morning and we haven't seen him since," replied the wife of Hawley's friend, when Bert said he had come to see his parent.

"I'm going to leave Jayville to-night, and would like to see him before I go. When he comes back tell him I will stop here on my way to Rye Junction before dark."

With these words Bert left the house and started out to make a few farewell calls.

The last visit he reserved for Helen Potts; but when he reached her home he was informed that Miss Helen was out calling at a friend's house, and was not expected home until after tea-time.

Lawyer Potts had gone to the county town on business, and had taken Mrs. Potts with him.

Jonas Potts, whom Bert had no desire to see, had gone fishing with a chum.

The boy was sadly disappointed because he would have to leave the village without saying good-bye to Helen, who had been so kind and sisterly to him, especially in his recent affliction.

"I'm afraid she'll think it strange of me," he mused, as he took his way toward the churchyard to view his mother's grave for the last time. "But what can I do? At any rate, she will know that I called."

Bert lingered long near his mother's grave.

His heart was desolate and sore, and he paid no heed to the flight of time.

It was after six o'clock when he passed through the gate of God's Acre into the lonesome road, and the shadows of evening were beginning to gather and to creep down upon the face of the peaceful landscape.

"It is later than I thought," muttered the boy, as he walked briskly down the road. "I'll have to take a short cut through the Whiteacre wood."

He soon left the road for that purpose.

It would save him at least three-quarters of a mile of walking.

The shadows were thick among the trees, as if this was their marshaling ground.

The soft earth deadened the sound of his rapid stride.

The boy looked neither to the right nor the left as he pressed forward in all haste, for he knew his kind farmer-friend would be keeping his supper warm against his return, and he hated to be the occasion of trouble to the excellent couple who had so kindly befriended him in his hour of trial.

Suddenly and without the least warning the ground gave way beneath his weight, and he sank a dozen feet with the rush of earth which accompanied his fall.

This had been accomplished with scarcely a sound, and with no injury to Bert, who found himself upon his hands and knees in the middle of a dry ditch.

As he started to extricate himself from the loose dirt, which covered his legs up to his knees, he heard the sound of voices on the other side of the hedge.

He would have paid little attention to this but that one of the voices sounded very like that of his father, who was apparently sober.

Peeping through the hedge, Bert saw he had not been mistaken.

His father was there, and with him were two rough-looking men, one of whom he identified as Rake, the hired hand, who had been one of the original causes of Ed Hawley's misfortunes.

Rake looked decidedly disreputable, and his companion was not a bit better.

Bert was much grieved to see his father in such questionable company, now that he was not under the influence of liquor.

Still, what else could be expected of a man who for the last ten years had been going to the dogs, without any regard whatever for public opinion.

"I'm afraid this will be my only chance to speak to father," said the boy to himself, as he gazed on the trio, who seemed to be in earnest converse; "but I hate to say what I wish to tell him before those men."

It happened, however, that the interview he had in mind

did not take place, for the first words that struck upon his ears rather startled him.

"It is agreed, then, that the three of us shall break into Lawyer Potts' house this evening?" spoke Rake, a greedy light shining from his little green eyes.

"Yes," replied Ed Hawley, a bit reluctantly.

"Sure," interjected the third ruffian glibly.

"We couldn't have a better chance," pursued Rake, cunningly. "I've found out that Potts himself and the old woman have gone to Branchtown. The kid, Jonas, won't be home until late. There'll be nobody but the two servants and the gal left to oppose us, and I reckon they won't count much, will they Harrow?"

"I should say not," grinned his boon companion.

"You owe the old rascal a grudge for doing you out of them six acres of land, Hawley; and now's your opportunity to square old scores, while you will feather your nest with banknotes, which I happen to know are in the house at this blessed min'it."

"Yes," said Hawley, with a dark frown; "I owe him a grudge, and it's chiefly on that account I'm with you hand and glove. He ruined me, and I shall never be happy until I get back at him."

"That's right," said Rake, slapping him on the back, while he winked at his companion over Hawley's shoulder. "I was beginning to be afraid you'd lost your backbone, but I see I was mistaken. Here, take another swig at this. It's prime old stuff, and came all the way from Baltimore."

He handed the deluded man a suspicious-looking flask, which Hawley greedily accepted and put to his lips as if it were the choicest nectar, instead of Satan's tippie.

Bert was horrified at what he overheard, and stood like a statue behind the hedge, not knowing what he ought to do under the circumstances.

He wanted to call out and warn his father against the perpetration of the contemplated crime; but he was afraid it would do no good, and only serve to bring down on him the vengeance of the two ruffians, if not also the anger of his own father.

"We shall have no trouble gettin' into the house from the rear. The window of the washroom will open at the invitation of this pretty little tool," and Rake exhibited a short steel jimmy. "And this," he added, producing a revolver, "will keep the wimmen in line till we've gone through the house."

"You say you know that Lawyer Potts has money on the premises?" asked Hawley, moistening his lips with his tongue.

"Well, I guess," grinned Rake, as he replaced the revolver in his hip-pocket.

"How do you know?" persisted his questioner, evidently not thoroughly convinced of the fact.

"Because after he had gone away this morning Farmer Whiteacre called at his house and left six hundred dollars for him with his daughter."

This seemed to satisfy Hawley, though Rake did not explain how he came by the information.

"There ought to be some nice pickings in the way of joolry and silverware," suggested Harrow.

"Sure thing," said his friend, who was managing the enterprise. "Lots of it. We kin hide it somewheres in the neighborhood until the excitement blows over."

"Right you are. We kin stow it away in the cellar of Hawley's tumble-down cottage till it's safe to come after it. No one is likely to go there."

"That's what we'll do with it," nodded Rake, the plan striking him as a good one.

"You're counting your chickens before they're hatched, I'm thinking," put in Hawley. "Better wait till we get hold of the stuff."

"Oh, we'll get it if it's in the house, and I reckon it's there all right," said the ringleader, with a contemptuous glare at Hawley.

"Sure we will," nodded Harrow. "What kin three wimmen do ag'inst us men after we git inside? It'll be a cinch."

"It's nearly dark, and time for us to be on the move. We've got to do the job early, before the lawyer and his old woman gets back."

The three men thereupon rose to their feet and walked away through the wood.

CHAPTER IV.

BERT TAKES A HAND IN THE DEFENCE OF LAWYER POTTS' PROPERTY.

"Oh, father, father, what are you coming to?" murmured Bert Hawley as he watched the only relative he had in the world vanish, with his scoundrelly associates, into the intricacies of Farmer Whiteacre's wood.

He climbed out of the dry ditch and stood in the path once more.

"They are going to rob Lawyer Potts' house to-night. What shall I do? If I notify the constable, as I ought to do, father will probably be arrested and sent to State prison for a crime he has been persuaded to take part in to satisfy an old-time grudge against the lawyer. No, I must try and prevent this robbery myself. It is my duty to save my father, if possible, from the consequences of his folly. I will go to the Potts house at once, see Miss Helen—who should have returned home by this time—and together we may be able to devise ways and means of frightening these men away. But I do hope I may be able to head father off and have a talk with him. It is terrible to think of the character of the company he is in."

So Bert, fully resolved to save Lawyer Potts' property from pillage, hurried in the direction which would bring him out of the wood and into the road.

A few minutes of brisk walking sufficed to accomplish this; then he bent his steps toward the lawyer's house, which stood quite alone at the end of Main street, where it made a junction with the county road.

It was a rather pretentious-looking building, the best, in fact, in Jayville; and a stranger viewing it would naturally have concluded that its owner was more than comfortably supplied with this world's goods. This was indeed

the fact, for Lawyer Potts was accounted wealthy by those who knew him.

He enjoyed the cream of the county law practice, and was one of the counsel of a big Virginia coal company.

Therefore he was much deferred to in Jayville, and his family was regarded as among the leaders, socially, of the county.

It was quite dark when Bert approached the front gate of Lawyer Potts' residence.

He had met no one since he lost sight of his father and the two rascals with him in the wood.

Now, however, he made out an indistinct figure coming up the street.

When he reached the gate the solitary person coming toward him turned out to be a girl, with a light hood over her head.

Instinctively it struck him that this was Helen Potts returning home.

And such proved to be the fact.

"Why, Bert Hawley, is that you?" exclaimed the pretty miss, who had already identified the boy, as he stood with one hand on the latch of the gate, waiting for her to come up.

"Yes, Miss Helen."

"Were you coming to see us?" she asked, offering her hand, which he took with unfeigned eagerness. "I'm afraid father and mother haven't returned from town yet. They did not expect to get home until late. I'm glad I got back in time to meet you. I should have been greatly disappointed had I missed you."

"Thank you, Miss Helen," replied Bert. "I called this afternoon to say good-bye, as it was my intention to leave Jayville this evening; but now that will be impossible."

"Are you really going to leave the village so soon?" said the girl gravely, as if the news was not welcome to her.

"Yes. I have got to make my own way in the world, you know, and Jayville is not just the kind of place for one to get ahead in very fast."

"Then you have given up all idea of farming?" she said.

"I have very little taste for such a life," he admitted. "I want to go where there are opportunities to rise to something worth while."

"I can hardly blame you, Bert," she answered earnestly. "I heard papa say that you are a bright boy, and that Jayville offered few attractions for a boy of your caliber."

"I hop I shall prove myself deserving of your father's good opinion," said Bert, gratefully.

"I know you will," replied the girl, with some enthusiasm, which, however, subsided all of a sudden as she looked into his face and reflected that this maybe was the last time she might ever see him.

Helen was a bright little girl, with ambitions of her own; and she had long since taken a great fancy to Bert Hawley, because he was such a gentlemanly boy, and had been willing to put his hand at anything to support his poor mother and worthless father.

She admired the self-sacrificing spirit of the lad, the

energy and perseverance he had displayed in his line of duty, all of which had won for him the respect and consideration of every one who knew him.

She felt sad to think that she was about to lose his society, for she had spent many pleasant hours in his company at one time or another.

He had somehow come to be her ideal of a noble, manly young fellow—a standard not attained by any of her prosperous young male acquaintances with whom she was allowed to associate.

It made her blush to think how little her own brother, Jonas, resembled this brave, earnest example of what Young America, in her opinion, ought to be.

"I think we had better go in, Miss Helen," said Bert, throwing an anxious glance up and down the road as he opened the gate for her to pass through. "I don't want to alarm you, but I have come here on a very serious errand."

"Why, what do you mean?" she said, looking at him in surprise. "I thought you said you came to bid us good-bye, since you are about to leave the village."

"I said I called this afternoon for that purpose, and was much disappointed to find you out. I expected by this time to be on my way to Rye Junction to take the night train for Baltimore. But while passing through Farmer Whiteacre's wood half an hour ago I overheard some men—I regret to say my father was one of them—plan to break into your house early to-night for the purpose of robbery."

"Rob our house?" gasped Helen, turning white.

"Yes; such is their intention. They know that your father and mother, as well as your brother, are away. In some way the leader of the enterprise has found out that Farmer Whiteacre called here this morning after your parents had left and paid you a large sum of money. They believe that only yourself and the two women servants will be in the house when they reach here, and therefore count on having things pretty much their own way."

"You frighten me!" cried the girl, all of a tremble.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Helen. I think with such help as I can give you we will be able to beat them off. We are forewarned what to expect, and that is half the battle, to my way of thinking."

They had reached the porch while speaking, and Helen hurriedly put her key into the lock of the front door and admitted them to the house.

"You are so good and brave to think of us, Bert. I shall never forget it, nor will papa and mama when I have told them," said the girl earnestly, as she led him into the library, where a light was burning dimly, as was the custom when the master of the house was temporarily absent at night. "Did you really mean that your father is——"

She paused suddenly, as if she thought it almost cruel to remind the boy of the painful admission he had made.

"My father—yes," replied the lad, with a catch of his breath. "It is true—but I am sure he is being led by the other two men. Oh, Miss Helen, he has been a drunkard, I confess with shame; he did not do the right thing by mother for some years, but he has not been a criminal as yet. I want to save him from that awful degradation if

I can. It would almost crush me if he were to be sent to prison. You will help me save him from that, will you not, Miss Helen?"

"I will do anything I can to prevent such a thing for your sake, Bert."

"Thank you," replied the boy, gratefully. "And now we had best prepare ourselves against this attack. Have you a revolver in the house?"

"Papa has one in his bedroom," she replied, a bit nervously. "It is always loaded."

"I wish you would get it for me, as it may serve to scare these men away when they see we are prepared for them."

Bert forbore to tell her that he knew that at least one of the rascals was provided with a similar weapon.

He waited in the library until Helen brought the pistol to him.

"I don't suppose the servants have gone to bed yet; it is only half-past eight."

"I don't believe they have," replied the girl.

"These men propose to break in through the window of the washroom. I mean to be there when they come and give them an unexpectedly warm reception."

"You mustn't expose yourself, Bert," said Helen, in an anxious tone, laying one hand on the boy's arm.

"Don't worry about me. I'm not going to run into danger if I can help it; but I am here to defend you, as well as your father's property, and I mean to do my duty."

"But, Bert——"

"Don't say another word, Miss Helen. There is no time to be lost if I am to keep the men from forcing an entrance. Let us go to the back of the house. I think the washroom communicates with the kitchen. Well, call the cook and have her start the fire going. I want to use hot water as one of my weapons. It is very effective without being exactly dangerous. I've known of many a husky tramp put to flight by a plucky woman armed with a kettle of water."

The servants were called into action, and Bert found that Mary, the cook, was no faint-away kind of a person, but as spunky as she was big and strong.

"Faith, it's meself that'll help yez to bate off the thaves, Masther Hawley, so I will. And hot wather is an iligant thing to make a man run, so it is."

And so preparations to receive their undesirable visitors were soon under way.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE ENEMY IS ROUTED.

At nine o'clock Mary announced that the water in the wash boiler she had put on the big stove had reached the boiling point.

There were no signs as yet of the enemy.

Bert had posted himself at the washroom window to await their coming, after he had personally inspected every door in the lower part of the house and found they were securely fastened by lock and bolt.

About this time the moon rose above the trees, flooding

the building and its approaches with a bright light, much to the brave boy's satisfaction.

It was impossible now for the thieves to reach their base of operations without being discovered by the watchful eyes on the alert for their coming.

Helen Potts insisted on remaining with Bert in the washroom, where he stood on guard.

"Jonas ought to be at home by this time," she said; "but I am afraid that he will take advantage of papa's absence to remain out as late as he dares. He has learned to play a game which he calls pool, and every chance he gets he goes over to the Essex House to indulge his taste for it. I don't approve of it at all; neither does papa; but my brother will have his own way when he can."

The words were hardly out of her mouth before Bert made out three shadows approaching the house by way of the apple orchard, which joined the truck patch immediately in the rear of the washroom.

"They are coming," said the boy, in a low tone.

"Are you sure, Bert?" asked Helen, nervously.

"Yes; three men are slinking through the apple orchard as though they didn't want to attract attention to themselves. Is the light out in the kitchen?"

"Yes, Bert."

"Then tell Mary the cook to fetch a pailful of boiling water and dipper. It won't be many seconds before they are right under this window, if they haven't changed their plan of operations."

The three men crossed the truck patch and vaulted the fence into the yard.

They were close enough now for Bert to recognize their features distinctly in the bright moonlight.

Rake and Harrow looked the cold-blooded and determined rascals they were; but Ed Hawley, who in physique had the advantage of his companions, acted like a man not thoroughly satisfied with the adventure in which he was engaged.

The other two kept close to him, however, and spurred him on.

After surveying the rear of the house carefully the trio appeared to be confident that they had a clear field before them.

"Don't seem to be any one stirrin'," Bert heard Harrow remark.

"Visitors ain't expected at this hour of the night," chuckled Rake, giving Hawley a nudge.

"Then the sooner we get it over and done with the better it'll suit me," said Bert's father, impatiently.

"That's the way to talk," answered Rake, approvingly.

"We'll get you eddicated up to this sort of thing bimeby."

"You want to learn to go the whole hog when you start out, and have done with such shillyshallying as you've been doing to-night," spoke up Harrow.

"You won't make any mistake about following what Harrow says. He knows the ropes. Now you watch me pry open that window. See how quick and neat I'll do it."

The window in question was the one behind which Bert stood on guard, dipper in hand, ready to discharge about

a pint of scalding water into the face of the confident Mr. Rake as soon as he had accomplished the first move in the game.

Rake had evidently had lessons from an expert, for he used his jimmy with professional accuracy and despatch.

With such a tool in practiced hands the washroom window as an obstacle to progress became a mere fiction and a sham.

The rascal opened it in what he was pleased to call three shakes of a dead lamb's tail.

Then he looked into the washroom.

A moment later he wished he had not.

Bert swung the dipper, and its boiling contents splashed full in the ruffian's face.

He gave a fearful yell of agonizing pain and tumbled backward on to the ground.

The effect on his two companions was most startling.

They were fairly paralyzed by this unexpected denouement, and Bert had time to replenish his dipper before either of them made a move.

The boy flung the second dose of scalding water at Harrow, burning his face and hands severely; and this broke the spell.

Ed Hawley seemed to realize that the game was up and that flight was the best thing he could resort to at that instant.

Haunted by a vision of the county jail, he did not stand on the order of his going, but started for the nearest fence with all the agility he was capable of.

And Harrow, howling and swearing like mad, followed in his steps, leaving his associate, Rake, squirming on the ground and tearing up the earth with his finger-nails in the torture of the moment.

The water had knocked him out as probably nothing else would have done, except a bullet from the revolver Bert had near at hand, and which he had resolved to avail himself of only as a last resort.

Finding that two-thirds of the enemy had fled, leaving the other third wounded on the field of battle, Bert, now master of the situation, determined to take that third prisoner.

So, calling Mary the cook and a piece of stout clothes-line to his aid, he issued forth from the kitchen door and seized upon Rake.

The rascal was in no condition to make any resistance worth mentioning to the combined strength of the stalwart boy and the muscular servant.

He was overpowered, secured, and removed to the kitchen to await the return of Lawyer Potts.

The cook, taking pity on his sufferings, applied certain home-made remedies to the burns, which had a soothing effect and eased the pain.

In proportion as his hurts subsided, his impudence returned.

"So it's you, Bert Hawley, who took the wind out of our sails, eh?" he flashed angrily, as he looked the athletic lad scornfully over from head to foot. "Well, I shan't forget it. You'll find I've got a long memory. If you

have me sent to the lock-up the whole county shall know that your drunken father is just as guilty as I am, d'ye understand?"

"I've nothing to do with what happens to you. Lawyer Potts will pass upon your case. I simply did my duty in defending this house from three men who were trying to make a forceable entry for the purpose of robbing the premises."

"Yah! You may send me behind the bars, you sanctimonious little monkey; but the time is bound to come when you'll have cause to wish you hadn't butted into what did not concern you."

With these words Rake relapsed into sulky silence, but he never removed his little ferret-like eyes from Bert as long as the lad remained within reach of his gaze.

It was half-past ten when Jonas' bungling efforts to use his night latchkey on the front door attracted the attention of his sister, and she let him in.

He proved to be a couple of sheets in the wind, as sailors say, which means that he was partially intoxicated—a nice state for a boy of his family connections to be found in, and Helen was thoroughly disgusted with him, and made no bones about telling him so.

"Wait until father hears about it; you'll catch it!" and she turned her back full upon him, too indignant to have any further converse with him.

"Who you entertaining in the parlor so late as this?" he asked, with a half tipsy curiosity. "Introduce me to (hie) your friend. Glad to know any friend of Sister Helen's."

He pushed her rudely aside and craned his neck around the door until he made out Bert Hawkins; then his face grew black, and he sneered:

"So zat's your friend, is it (hie)! Don't wanna know him. Common pauper. Father's lazy drunkard. Mother's——"

Helen clapped her hand over his mouth and pushed him up the hall.

"I'll tell father how you are behaving," she cried, tears of mortification and resentment overflowing her eyes.

"Tell him, tattle tongue!" snorted Jonas, as he began to stagger upstairs to bed. "I'm a gen'leman (hie). Don't sociate with beggars, not on your (hie) life."

He escaped just in time.

In the course of five minutes his father and mother arrived home.

Of course Lawyer Potts was astonished to learn what had taken place that evening.

He warmly thanked Bert, and complimented him upon the stratagem by which he had brought confusion into the ranks of the would-be robbers.

"What I once held against your father is past and gone," he said, with some feeling. "I should be glad to do him a favor to-day in recognition of the debt of grateful appreciation I owe his son."

The lawyer would not hear of Bert leaving his home that night.

"You must pass your last night in Jayville under my

roof," he added, when the boy explained to him his future movements, as far as he could outline them. "I will give you a letter to a personal friend in Baltimore requesting him to do whatever he can to advance your prospects."

"Thank you, sir."

"And you will write to me sometimes, won't you, Bert?" said Helen, as she bade him good-night. "I shall be anxious to know how you are getting on."

Next morning as he was about to start for Rye Junction she repeated the request with even greater earnestness, and Bert, delighted that she should show such an interest in him, readily promised to write her when he had anything worth telling.

CHAPTER VI.

BERT GETS WORK ON A MARYLAND PEACH FARM.

Bert Hawley arrived in the city of Baltimore just as the whistles of many of the large manufacturing establishments were blowing for the noon hour.

His train came in at the Calvert Street Depot, and he soon found himself on the sidewalk of a big city—a new and strange experience for the country-bred boy.

What a noisy, bewildering place, with its rush of vehicles, its rapidly moving electric cars, its eager-looking, hurried pedestrians.

The crowd jostled him, and he wondered how he was ever to find his way about in such a great maze of thoroughfares.

It occurred to him that the best thing he could do was to make his way to Light street, in the neighborhood of what he had been told was the Basin, and inquire for the commission merchant for whom he had a letter of introduction from Lawyer Potts.

While wondering how he was ever going to get there he noticed a policeman sauntering toward him.

"Will you please tell me how I can find Light street?" he asked the majestic-looking officer of the law.

"Well, you're on Charles street now. Just keep on going till you reach Pratt street, turn one block to your left, and then you are at Light street. You can't miss it, because it lies alongside the water."

"Is that the Basin?"

"That's what it is," answered the cop, walking off.

Bert followed the directions to a letter, and was presently rejoiced to find he had struck the locality he was in search of.

"Why, that was easy," he said, smiling to himself at the apparent simplicity of this first attempt to find his way about the big city.

He looked at the address on the envelope he had carried very carefully in his jacket pocket.

"Cunningham & Co.—Light Street."

He followed the numbers till he came to the building which bore the sign of Cunningham & Co.

Entering the store, which was lined with baskets of early peaches from the eastern shore of Maryland, he asked the porter if he could see Mr. Cunningham.

The man looked him over, from his shabby shoes to his equally shabby cap, and then shook his head.

"Why not?" asked Bert, declining to be put off in that way.

"Why not?" replied the porter, with some asperity; "'cause he's gone to Philadelphia."

"Gone to Philadelphia!" repeated the boy, in a tone of disappointment.

He had been foolish enough to build a small-sized air-castle on the strength of that letter, which had come to him as an unexpected boon, and now the alluring picture crumbled and vanished like a soap-bubble that had burst.

The porter gave no further attention to his shabby questioner, and so there was nothing for Bert to do but to return to the sidewalk again.

"Hard luck!" he muttered disconsolately. "I thought I was sure of an opening."

Now he began to realize that the day was very warm, and that he was both hungry and thirsty.

"I've got the price, at any rate," he mused. "The question is to find a cheap place where I can get something substantial without making too big a hole in my capital."

By dint of repeated inquiries he found a sort of chop-house off of East Pratt street, and here he got an excellent meal for twenty-five cents.

Feeling much refreshed and more encouraged to breast whatever disappointments might yet lie in wait for him, he returned to Light street and wandered up and down the docks that line the Basin, quite fascinated by the bustle and activity he saw there.

The longshore work was mostly done by negroes, and many of the deckhands on board the Chesapeake Bay steamers were of the same race.

But there were also plenty of idle men, who found it much pleasanter to sit in the shade of the spile heads and loaf the afternoon away than turn their hands to useful employment.

"Looking for work, young fellow?" asked a well-dressed man, stopping squarely in front of Bert and eyeing him critically from head to foot.

"I can't say that I've been looking for it just yet," smiled Bert; "but I won't refuse a decent job if it's offered to me."

"Well, how would you like to go over to the eastern shore and pick peaches? I can offer you a six weeks' job, at any rate."

"I'll go," replied the boy readily, for he had a general idea of what the work was.

"Step aboard the steamer, then," pointing to a small side-wheeler on the other side of the dock, on which freight was being loaded at a lively rate.

Bert, grip in hand, just as he had come from the depot, followed his new employer over the gangplank.

"You're from the country, aren't you?" said the man, whose name the boy presently found out was Bates.

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so. I prefer to engage country lads when I can get them. But we have all sorts—those three over there who are going down to work for me are John Hop-

kins College boys. Possibly they are going for the fun of the thing—though, as a matter of fact, picking peaches ain't such a cinch—possibly because they need the money; I didn't ask them. They offered their services and I hired them offhand. I may put them to work on the culling machines, which they would prefer, no doubt, or I may send them into the orchard and keep them there—just as it strikes me. You look kind of husky; are you used to driving a cart?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I rather like your face. I think I'll let you get your hand in on the machines, and help load and do the driving on one of the carts to the boat landing on the creek."

About this time the steamboat got under way. She had a miscellaneous load of freight and a fair number of passengers, destined for various landings on the eastern shore of Maryland.

She worked her way among a forest of shipping out into the long and narrow harbor beyond, thence past Fort McHenry, at the mouth of the harbor, into the Patapsco river, and finally past the lighthouse into the big Chesapeake Bay, and pointed her nose across.

After a three hours' sail she made her first landing.

Half an hour afterward she entered a wide creek and made fast to a small wharf.

Here Bert and a dozen other peach hands were marched ashore.

Wagons were in waiting to carry them to the farm, probably a mile away on the bay shore.

It comprised about four hundred acres, the larger part of which was laid out in a peach orchard.

A big lake divided the fields from the orchard.

An imposing two-story brick building, with unusually thick walls—built about the close of the Civil War—was the most conspicuous object on the farm.

Adjoining it, across the yard, was a small two-story frame structure where the hands were quartered.

As the wagons drove up the long road in the gathering gloom of the summer's day, Bert noticed the gleam from the lighthouse on the long, narrow island out in the bay directly opposite; and he could also make out in the far distance the light at the entrance to the mouth of the Patapsco.

The novelty of the situation into which he had been thrown so unexpectedly rather charmed Bert, and on the spur of the moment he voted the peach industry a dandy occupation.

Perhaps it is, if you really like that kind of hard work.

Bert was used to hard farm work, so he was not likely to kick at what lay before him.

At any rate, he had a six weeks' job at good wages to count on.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

Bert's first job was to turn the handle of one of the culling machines in a shady nook of the orchard.

This apparatus was simplicity itself—a framework built on a slight incline, with a shallow box at the upper end to receive the almost ripe fruit as it came from baskets on a wagon from the picking gangs; then two sets of long, narrow rollers, each set of a different width between the rollers, which were kept in motion by the turning of a handle; then a shallow receptacle at the base, into which the larger and finer variety of peaches finally found a resting place before being run out into boxes for shipment. Thus three grades of the fruit were quickly assorted.

Sometimes Bert was called on to nail up the wooden crates into which the fruit was sent to market.

Two shipments were made daily, and Bert drove one of the wagons to the steamboat landing on the creek, and helped pile the boxes up on the wharf.

Most of the people employed on the farm at this season were young fellows of about Bert's age, and although they had long hours of labor—working practically from daylight to dark—they managed to extract a good deal of fun out of the situation.

One of them had brought a banjo over from Baltimore, and after supper they inaugurated a species of high-jinks for their own entertainment.

Bert found he had a good voice for singing, and it was not long before he could render some of the popular songs in fine style.

His genial disposition made him immensely popular with his comrades, and also with the proprietor of the farm and his family, which embraced three fine-looking girls and a stalwart son.

Bert's second Sunday at the peach farm was marked by a special honor.

He was asked Saturday morning by one of the Bates sisters—Miss Belle—if he would like to drive them to church next morning, a distance of some three miles.

"I should be very happy to do so, Miss Belle, but I haven't any decent clothes. I am sorry to say my working outfit represents the extent of my wardrobe."

And he felt that his candid admission was rather mortifying.

The girl, who was a charming brunette of seventeen, laughed.

"I'll ask pa to let you go to Chestertown—that's ten miles away on the Chester river—this afternoon to provide yourself with a new suit, if you like."

"I will be glad to do so if he will allow me."

"He'll let you go if I ask him. Pa never refuses me anything."

"It's very kind of you, Miss Belle."

"Don't be so sure of that," she replied, mischievously.

"Why not?" asked Bert, in some surprise.

"It's simply pure selfishness," said the girl, demurely. "We girls have set our hearts on having you take us to church to-morrow, and we don't mean to let you have any excuse to back out of it."

"I'm afraid the rest of the boys will be jealous over the

honor you are about to accord me, and maybe they won't do a thing to me when they get the chance."

"You aren't afraid of them, are you, Mr. Bert?" said Belle Bates, roguishly.

"Mr. Bert! Oh, come now; my name is just plain Bert. I don't want any 'Mr.' to it."

"Well, Bert, then," said the girl, with a slight hesitation and just the suspicion of a blush.

"That's better. Now I'll answer your question. No; I'm not afraid of them—especially when it's a matter of escorting three such pretty girls as yourself and sisters."

"Aren't you complimentary!" laughed Miss Belle. "Jennie and Lizzie will just go into a spasm over that when I tell them."

"Then I hope you won't tell them."

"I wouldn't miss doing it for anything," laughed the girl, as she skipped away.

About three o'clock Mr. Bates called Bert aside.

"I understand you would like to fit yourself out with another suit of clothes. Here is an order on one of the Chestertown stores. Go over to the house. You will find my son about ready to start for town."

Bert thanked him, took the order, and in fifteen minutes was on his way to the county seat with George Bates.

Chestertown was in existence during the Revolutionary War, and the town claims to have had the honor of a visit from George Washington.

At any rate, George Bates pointed out a well to Bert at which it was generally believed the Father of his Country stopped to quench his thirst on a certain occasion, the exact date of which seems to be involved in obscurity.

The two boys returned by the old road, which led through the old village of Fairleigh, where they stopped to get the mail.

Bert looked uncommonly spruce the next morning in his suit of navy blue and a four-in-hand tie with a rhinestone ornament, when he stepped into the double-seated buggy with the three Bates girls, who were decked out in all their finery.

Belle managed to take her seat beside him, and we are bound to say that his companions watched him drive off with his load of youth and beauty with feelings of envy.

When the little red brick Methodist church was reached their arrival caused a flutter of mild excitement among the female acquaintances of the Misses Bates.

After services Belle and her sisters were surrounded by a bevy of friends, all curious to find out who this handsome young fellow was that they had with them.

Belle introduced Bert to several of their particular friends, and he made a decidedly favorable impression upon the fair ones.

When he had returned to the farm he, with the three college boys, were invited to take dinner with the family, and the four of them enjoyed the occasion immensely.

The ensuing month passed all too quickly for Bert Hawley.

Although he had worked hard and faithfully, he had never enjoyed himself so much in his life.

Besides, the money he was earning was all his own—a nest-egg, as it were, on which he expected to build his future fortune.

He had written to Helen Potts and had received an answer from her.

Belle Bates had noticed the handwriting on his letter, and had teased him until he consented to tell her all about his fair correspondent.

"I suppose you think lots of her, don't you?" asked Miss Belle, with a twinge of jealousy, for she was not indifferent to her father's young hired hand.

"Yes," admitted Bert, "I do. I have known her many years, and she was always very kind to me, especially at the time of my mother's death," and the boy's eyes became moistened at the recollection of his recent loss.

"Is she very pretty?"

"I think she is."

Belle did not look extra well pleased to hear that.

"I suppose——" Then she stopped suddenly and looked out of the window.

"What was you going to say?" asked Bert.

"Oh, nothing," answered the girl, getting up and walking away without another word.

"I wonder what's the matter with Belle to-day?" asked Jennie of Lizzie that evening, when the two girls had gone upstairs to bed.

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Lizzie. "But I do know she's been as cross as she well could be."

"I noticed she didn't speak a word to Bert Hawley this evening when he and the Titcomb boys were with us on the veranda. That's something unusual. Do you think they had a spat?"

"I'm sure I can't tell. Belle hasn't spoken three words to me since dinner."

"Nor me, either."

Then they got to talking about something else.

The peach season ended the following week, and all the extra hands, with the single exception of Bert, were paid off and dismissed.

Mr. Bates, who had taken a great liking to Bert, had persuaded him to stay a while longer to help him in the field in place of a hand taken down with a very bad attack of chills and fever—a malady prevalent in that neighborhood during the summer.

Bert now ate altogether with the family, though he slept with the two field hands in the quarters used for the hired help.

The afternoon of the 15th of September closed in dull and gloomy.

It was close on to supper time, and the boy was making a short cut from one of the fields on the edge of the now denuded peach orchard.

This took him along the bay shore.

Looking out over the choppy water of the Chesapeake he saw a small, dirty-looking sloop lying at anchor within a hundred feet of the bluff on which the Bates house stood.

She looked like one of the oyster boats he had noticed lying in the Basin the day he had arrived in Baltimore.

The season had already commenced, so he judged that this must be a craft engaged in the business.

"It isn't an occupation I'd care to follow," mused Bert, as he walked along with the rake he carried swinging over his shoulder.

He leaped across the shallow stream which formed the connecting link between the bay and the lake in the heart of the farm and approached the lane which led up from the shore to the house.

It was here the bluff began, which ran for a mile or so down the shore, and the place was thickly covered with short trees and shrubbery.

His hand was on the little gate when he heard a noise in the bushes.

Turning his head, he saw, not two yards away, the villainous face of Rake, thrust quite through the shrubbery, and regarding him with an expression decidedly menacing.

CHAPTER VIII.

KIDNAPPED BY OYSTER PIRATES.

Bert was clearly startled by this apparition of the villain Rake, who he supposed to be safe behind the bars for the attempted burglary of the Potts house.

Just then one of the field-hands who had rowed himself across the lake came tramping up, and his appearance occasioned the sudden withdrawal of Rake's head and shoulders through the shrubbery.

"The fellow recognized me, that's certain," murmured Bert. "Evidently he's got it in for me, and I shouldn't care to meet him on a lonesome stretch of road unless I was well prepared to stand him off."

At the supper table Bert remarked about the sloop anchored off the bluff.

"Probably an oysterman," said Mr. Bates. "They occasionally pick up a few oysters close in along here—though they have no right to do it, as my property rights cover at least a hundred yards out of water frontage. I never say anything, though, as these men generally send me up a big mess of fish and oysters in recognition of the privilege."

Nothing more was said on the subject, and after the meal Bert was invited to the parlor.

He sang several songs, the girls took turns at the piano, and George Bates told a funny story or two as his contribution to the enjoyment of the evening.

Then the clock struck nine, and this was the signal that bedtime had come.

Bert slept by himself at one end of the quarters, while his two companions had cots at the other end of the second-story room.

When Bert ascended to the room that evening he found the others asleep.

Outside a cold, drizzling rain was falling, and the blustering wind from the bay rattled the windows in their casements.

Bert glanced out of his window, which faced the Chesapeake, but the prospect was blacker than even the ace of spades.

The only thing visible was the glimmer from the lantern of the lighthouse on the island opposite.

Bert tumbled into bed, and in five minutes was asleep; but his slumber was visited by frightful dreams.

He thought he lay, as he did, in his bed under the window.

That the passing wind and pattering rain sounded in his ears.

But above these sounds came the sharp creaking of the big door downstairs as it swung on its hinges.

Bearing a lantern, two stalwart, ruffianly-looking fellows came creeping cautiously upstairs and entered the room.

The face of one of them, reflected in the dim glow of the lantern, was Rake.

Bert shuddered, for something told the boy the man meant to do mischief.

The fellow who carried the lantern raised it aloft, and the pair glanced about the room.

The sleeping boy attracted their attention, and they approached his cot.

"Here he is," said Rake, his unpleasant features assuming an expression of gratified malice.

"He's a fine-looking lad, all right," growled his companion. "Just such a chap would be useful aboard the dredger."

"That's what I said, wasn't it?" returned Rake, with an evil grin.

"Ay, so you did. And because you said so I'm here to kidnap him aboard the hooker."

"I guess we kin do it without raisin' a muss."

"It won't be the first I've shanghaied into the bizness," chuckled his associate.

He put down the lantern, drew a coarse handkerchief from his pocket, wet it with a portion of the contents of a bottle he took from his pocket, and dropped the rag over the boy's face.

Truly, Bert's nightmare was very realistic.

So realistic, in fact, that he tried to struggle against the action of the man.

But just as he attempted to do so everything faded away and his mind became a blank.

Bert was accustomed to wake up at half-past four at that season of the year.

It was after six o'clock before he opened his eyes, in a dull, lazy way, on the morning following the nightmare.

And he was rather inclined to fancy that he was experiencing a second edition of his unpleasant dream.

For his surroundings were new and strange to him—a dirty, cramped-up box of a place, which was full of disagreeable odors, and wobbled about as though it had not any foundation to stand upon.

There were no windows to be seen but a scuttle-like aperture in one corner of the roof, as it seemed to the boy, through which the leaden air streamed, and this same air seemed to be of the consistency of pea soup.

Bert pinched himself to see if he was really awake.

If this test was any evidence of the fact he certainly was.

What, then, did this wonderful transformation mean?

The boy realized that he was lying in a narrow bunk, against a wall that reeked of fish.

A coarse, rotten blanket was wrapped about him, and his every-day clothes were lying in a heap on top.

"What the dickens does this all mean?" he muttered in surprise.

He was conscious of the fact that he had a bad headache and that he felt decidedly sick.

In fact, he was growing more ill every moment.

However, he was not left long in ignorance of his situation.

A heavy tread approached the hole which admitted the greasy-looking light.

A pair of heavy sea boots, followed by a huge form encased in flabby trousers and a pea jacket, dropped through the scuttle hole.

Then an ugly countenance topped by a woollen cap, came into view, and the much-dreaded Rake was glowering down upon the boy in a stooping fashion, for the ceiling was low and it was not possible for him to stand upright.

He looked for all the world like some hideous spider about to pounce upon a defenceless fly caught in its web.

"So you're awake, are you?" quoth the one-time burglar, smacking his bloated lips over the object of his enmity.

"I'm not quite sure whether I am or not," replied Bert, with a listlessness produced by an overnight dose of chloroform.

"Aren't you?" said Rake, with a hideous grin. "Then I'll have to wake you up."

Whereupon he grabbed up a stout length of inch rope, and with a swing brought it down with considerable force upon the lad's limbs.

It was a cruel blow, and it caused Bert to scream with pain.

"You're awake now, I reckon," chuckled the man. "Get up, or I'll give you another taste of it," and he made a threatening motion as if about to repeat the dose.

"Please don't," begged the boy. "I feel dreadfully sick."

"You won't feel no better stayin' here, even if I allowed you to—which I won't. Get up and into them clothes of your'n, or you kin guess what'll happen to you."

"Where am I?" groaned Bert, making an attempt to obey.

"Where are you? Aboard the dredger Polly."

"On board a vessel?"

"Well, I call her a sloop; p'raps you think she's a steamer?" and he grinned diabolically.

"Then I've been kidnapped," moaned the boy in despair. "My dream was true."

"If you dreamed you was kidnapped it warn't no lie. You're goin' ter help us work the dredgin' machine when we fish fer eyesters, and you're goin' to git no wages, but as many thumps as you kin stand if you doesn't work lively."

During these choice remarks of the disreputable Rake Bert had been literally dragging on his garments.

He was so ill he could scarcely stand, but reeled about like a drunken boy.

"Now come here and get on deck."

Rake grabbed Bert roughly by the nape of his packet and fired him through the scuttle.

The boy landed on all fours on the hard, filthy planks of the forward deck, and a lurch of the sloop in the choppy sea rolled him into the scupper.

He lay there, caring little whether he was chucked overboard or not.

But Rake, having followed his victim, did not propose to allow the boy to lie around like a log.

He gripped him by the jacket and yanked him to his feet.

Then he shook him as a terrier might a rat.

"Come now, none of that; d'ye hear? I'll knock the seasickness out of you in three shakes of a lamb's tail. I owe you somethin' for spilin' that little job of mine in Jayville, you monkey you! You spilled bilin' water into my face, and you kin bet your life I'm goin' to make you sweat for it."

Bert was feeling so dreadful that he hung like a wet rag in the rascal's grasp.

Rake dragged him along the deck and threw him in a heap at the base of the dredging apparatus.

"Lie there, if you will, till I get ready to attend to you."

Then he walked aft and sank down into the cubby-like cabin appropriated by the skipper of the Polly.

A couple of the crew, who had dimly observed Rake's behavior through the fog, which partially obscured the deck of the sloop and entirely blotted out the waters of the bay, drew about the miserable boy and looked down upon him with a kind of pity.

They knew to a certain extent what he was up against—the back-breaking, soul-sickening slavery of the illicit oyster dredger, the pirate of Chesapeake Bay.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT ON THE CHESAPEAKE.

One of the most miserable objects in the world, even under the most favorable conditions, is a seasick person; but when to the miseries of the malady is added a condition of refined persecution at the hands of a brutal enemy, the reader may have a slight idea of what Bert Hawley suffered during the next few hours.

The boy had never been upon rough water before in his life.

He was not at sea, it is true; but rough inland waters will lay one out with an acute attack of what the French call *mal de mer* (literally sickness of the sea) as effectually as the broad Atlantic.

Bert, however, came out of his physical trouble quicker than he would have done had he been permitted to remain below in the bunk.

A rope's end, frequently applied to his limbs with fiendish delight by the rascal Rake, kept him on the move, and the seasickness soon dwindled in comparison.

All this time the Polly was creeping down the bay under the fog to one of the oyster-beds which the skipper of the

scoop proposed to despoil for his own profit, in open defiance of the law.

He had arms aboard, which he proposed to use against the lawful workers of the field if, as was probable, they would attempt to drive him away.

Shortly after dinner the skipper of the Polly judged by his soundings that he had arrived in a favorable locality for his business, and the crew was first set to work with tongs, and, results proving satisfactory, the dredging machinery was put in operation; and then Bert got his first taste of what was in store for him.

"We've hit a fine bed," remarked the boss of the outfit in high glee as the oysters were scraped up in great abundance.

"Betcher life," replied Rake, who appeared to be at home in the business. "If the fog'll only keep up we'll have a load in no time. Work, you little monkey, work!" he yelled at Bert, flourishing the rope he held in his hand as a gentle reminder of what the boy might expect in case he allowed his energies to flag for a single moment.

And Bert ere long began to wonder if there was anything harder in this world than oyster dredging under a brutal master.

At five o'clock the wind veered around to another quarter and the fog began to lift.

In twenty minutes it was as clear as a bell, with the wind dropping. A large rowboat was bearing down on them from the point of land under the lee of which they had been stealing the oysters.

"Here they come, my bullies!" shouted the captain of the Polly, taking his glass from his eyes. "There's six in that boat, and they've got several shotguns. We've got to see 'em and send 'em kitin' where they came from."

He disappeared below and soon came back on deck again with an armful of shotguns.

The men grabbed a gun apiece and prepared to resist the enemy.

"Here, you young sea-cook!" cried Rake; "take hold of that shootin' iron, and see that you use it when the time comes, or it'll be the worse for you; d'ye understand?"

A glaring eye and the tickling qualities of the rope's end compelled the boy to obey.

But his blood was up, and had Rake been half-observant of the indications he would have seen danger in the boy's eye.

"Clear out of here, you dern pirates!" shouted a voice from the bow of the boat.

"We'll go when we git good and ready!" replied the captain of the Polly, making a funnel of his two hands.

The man in the bow of the boat turned around and said something to his companions.

They stopped rowing and lay on their oars just out of range, while the steersman fired a revolver in the air.

This appeared to be a signal to the shore, for presently other men, who had been gathering on the beach, ran to a hut, and arming themselves with shotguns, crowded into a second boat, pushed off, and rowed out to join their comrades.

This display of force did not intimidate the skipper.

He muttered an oath, raised the rifle he held in his hands, and, taking deliberate aim at the first boat, fired.

The stroke oarsman half arose in his seat and clapped his hand to his right arm, his oar slipping from his grasp and drifting away.

The shot, however, did not stop the progress of the boat, which was aiming for the sloop's stern, while the second boat was making a beeline for her bows.

The attacking party was soon within musket range, and the crew of the Polly opened fire with their shotguns.

The men in the boats stopped rowing and returned the fire vigorously.

"Why, don't you shoot, you little monkey?" roared Rake, with an oath, raising the stock of his gun to strike Bert.

But just then a slug tore a livid gash in his cheek, and he dropped his weapon with a roar of pain and clapped his hands to his face.

Bert seized Rake's gun and with his own retreated to the heel of the bowsprit.

With his own shotgun he fired both charges in rapid succession close above the heads of the crew, thus diverting their aim and thoughts from the oncoming boats.

Pitching his gun overboard, he grabbed up Rake's weapon and fired at the skipper's arm as he was leveling his Winchester for the sixth time.

The rifle fell to the deck with a ringing sound, and the captain of the Polly staggered and flopped down on his haunches.

"Drop your guns," ordered the boy peremptorily to the crew, "or I'll fire right into the crowd of you!"

Firing ceased from the deck of the Polly long enough for the boats to come up.

Then a dozen husky fellows scrambled on board the oyster pirate, and the game was up.

"Who are you, young fellow?" asked the leader of the attacking party, whose arm had suffered from the first rifle shot and was bound up with a red handkerchief.

"My name is Bert Hawley, and I was kidnapped from the Great Oak Manor Farm last night by a pair of these rascals, one of whom owes me a personal grudge."

"It's evident you're not one of them, and your plucky behavior has largely contributed to the capture of this pirate. You shan't lose anything by it."

The pirates were put under arrest, the skipper and Rake being bound, as they looked to be dangerous ruffians to handle, as indeed they were.

The anchor of the Polly was lifted and the sloop towed inshore.

Bert soon ascertained that this spot was on the western shore of Maryland, several miles below Baltimore.

The boy told of the vile treatment he had received on board from the scoundrel Rake, displaying livid bruises on his limbs as evidence of the truth of the story.

He received the sympathy and the admiration of the rightful guardians of the oyster-bed.

The prisoners were taken before a county magistrate, and

on the strength of the evidence against them they were held for trial and sent to the county jail.

Bert was complimented by the magistrate and invited to supper at his residence.

Later on a committee from the oystermen called at the magistrate's house and presented the boy with one hundred dollars as a slight testimonial of their appreciation of the plucky services he had rendered them that afternoon.

Next morning he took a train for Baltimore. From there he took the afternoon boat for Worton creek, whence he walked over to the farm, presenting himself before Mr. Bates about dark.

"Well, upon my word, Bert, where have you been these couple of days?" asked the proprietor of the establishment.

"You'll hardly believe me when I give you the particulars of my remarkable adventure; but nevertheless I've been through the toughest experience of my life in the last forty-eight hours."

Then Bert made a clean breast of the affair, and backed his words up with a copy of a Baltimore afternoon daily, which reported the scrap between the oyster men and the poachers, giving due credit to Bert, as well as stating in his own words how he came to be on board the pirate.

As a matter of course, Bert expanded into a hero during the remainder of his stay on the farm.

Everybody on the farm was sorry to lose Bert when, a week later he packed his grip and George Bates drove him to Worton station to take the huckleberry train for Clayton, en route for Philadelphia, where he had settled upon going.

His wages, which Mr. Bates paid him in a lump, amounted to nearly one hundred dollars.

Altogether he had two hundred dollars to start out in the world with.

CHAPTER X.

BERT ARRIVES IN PHILADELPHIA AND GETS EMPLOYMENT.

At Wilmington, Del., Bert changed cars for Philadelphia, and finally arrived in the City of Brotherly Love, at the Broad Street station, early in the afternoon.

He bore a letter of introduction to a cousin of Mr. Bates, a publisher and bookseller on Ninth street, near Chestnut.

He reached Mr. Love's store without any difficulty, and was fortunate enough to find the gentleman in his office.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Master Hawley," said the publisher, after he had read the letter, which was a very flattering one. "Mr. Bates says you expect to look for employment in this city, with the idea of remaining here."

"Yes, sir," answered Bert, politely.

"I should be glad to give you an opening in the store if I had a vacancy. However, I can offer you something that will produce better results, pecuniarily speaking, if you should be successful, than a salesman's position. Besides, you would be more independent. The amount of your income will depend entirely on your own efforts. We almost always have an opening in our subscription book department for a bright, energetic lad, of pleasing personality, to take orders for our serial publications, issued and de-

livered in monthly parts. If you think you would like to make a trial at it, I will introduce you to the manager of that department, and he will give you an insight into that branch of the business."

"If you really think I might suit you I will be glad to have a trial."

"You have given me the impression that you are adapted to interviewing people. You have an interesting face, your manner is polite and engaging, and you seem to possess that peculiar magnetic quality which attracts persons to you."

"I wasn't aware I possessed so many good qualities, Mr. Love," said Bert, with a smile.

"I don't think I've mentioned all your good qualities, by any means," said the publisher pleasantly. "If you take a liking to the business I am satisfied you will prove successful at it. Our best canvassers make as high as thirty dollars and over a week, and if you have it in you there is no reason why you shouldn't do as well in time."

Mr. Love then took Bert upstairs and presented him to Mr. Prescott, the manager of the subscription department, requesting that gentleman to instruct him thoroughly in the details and pointers of subscription book canvassing.

The manager was a bright young man of thirty-five. He had started as a canvasser himself many years before, and by adaptability and strict attention to business had risen to his present responsible position.

He gave the boy the benefit of many wrinkles he had picked up himself in the course of his experience as a canvasser.

He handed him a printed copy of the stereotyped instructions to small out-of-town agents.

"Read that over very carefully, and consider each point as it is there presented, and it will be of great advantage to you, a beginner at the business."

"I will do so," answered Bert.

"As you are a stranger in Philadelphia, I will give you a pocket map of the city. This will enable you to familiarize yourself with the names and locations of the streets. You had better put in to-morrow walking about town, with a view to getting the lay of the land."

"I should like to do that first of all," replied the boy.

"Have you got a boarding place yet?"

"No, sir; I was going to ask you to direct me as to how I shall find a reasonably cheap place."

"I can send you to a friend of mine who will be glad to accommodate you. She is a widow, and lives in North Twelfth street, near Ridge avenue, which runs differently from any of the other streets, cutting diagonally across the North Side. It makes a junction with this street—which is South Ninth—at Vine street, so that it will be a simple matter for you to find your way from your home to this office," and the manager indicated the way on the map. "You will observe that the city is laid out so that the streets run north and south, east and west. This is Market street here. All the numerically named streets (which include Front, which is equivalent to First, and

Broad, which takes the place of Fourteenth) cross it. Those on that side you see are called North Second, Third, etc., while on this side the same streets are called South Second, Third, etc. Market street, like Chestnut—the next important street this side of it—not only runs the entire length of the city between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers, but crosses the latter by means of a bridge,” and the manager pointed to the spot on the map.

“I shouldn’t think it would be hard to find one’s way about the city after you once get the hang of it,” said Bert, looking at the diagram.

“It isn’t,” answered Mr. Prescott. “You’ll soon get used to it,” and he refolded the map and handed it to the boy, who put it in his pocket.

“Now,” said the manager, “I am going to put you out on our ‘Picturesque California,’ a work of which we have only issued six numbers so far. I should like to have you come here to-morrow afternoon and read up the published numbers and study the prospectus of the whole work, for the purpose of familiarizing yourself with the scope of the publication. This will enable you to talk understandingly to the people you approach for the purpose of getting their subscriptions.”

“Very well, sir.”

“I will now prepare a letter to Mrs. Morgan, of North Twelfth street, introducing you, and will send a boy with you to show you the way.”

A few minutes later Bert left the publishing house under the wing of one of the errand boys of the establishment, en route for his new home.

CHAPTER XI.

BERT’S FIRST CANVASSING EXPERIENCE.

Bert Hawley, provided with the complete outfit of the serial book canvasser, began his new vocation on Thursday morning in the well-to-do residential section of the city.

The boy’s pleasant face and ingratiating manners procured him an interview with the lady of the house in nine cases out of ten.

Each time that he mentioned the purport of his visit, however, he was politely told that the party either did not want the work, or had something like it already in the house, or gave some other excuse for declining to subscribe.

But Bert was not easily rebuffed.

“I would like to show you the samples I have with me,” he said to the lady on whom he made his first call; “that is, if you have a few moments to spare. California is a wonderful country—a country of remarkable contrasts, madam. The engravings accompanying this publication, of which there are several, you see, in each part, are faithful reproductions of the originals, procured especially for this work at very great expense. Here, for instance, is a very fine photo-engraving of the Yosemite Valley, with the Bridal Veil Falls in the distance. The valley is situated on the Merced River, in the county of Mariposa, one hundred and forty miles from San Francisco, and is nearly in the center of the State. It is about six miles in length,

by a half to a mile in width, and is enclosed in frowning granite walls rising to a height of from three to six thousand feet. The waterfalls in the vicinity of this wonderful valley surpass in beauty many of the best known and most visited ones of Europe. The valley itself is almost one vast flower garden.”

“It has been the dream of my life to visit California some day,” remarked the lady with sparkling eyes, as she listened eagerly to the boy’s description.

“You certainly shouldn’t miss it,” he replied; “but, next to the actual thing itself, this work will give you more pleasure and information on the subject than anything you could possibly have in your house.”

Whereupon the lady was easily induced to sign a contract, and was eager to learn when the numbers already in print would be delivered to her.

“They will be sent to-morrow, or the next day at the latest.”

“Do you know, I had not the slightest intention of subscribing when you opened your sample copies; but you really have presented the matter in such an interesting way that I feel I must have the work.”

“You will never regret taking it, I assure you, madam,” answered Bert, with one of his captivating smiles as he bowed himself out, so that the lady could not help remarking as soon as he was out of hearing, “What a nice boy that is!”

“This is a picture of the Mariposa grove of trees,” he said to another lady to whom he had just been describing the beauties of the Mariposa Valley. “These trees are of several centuries’ growth, and are by far the largest in the world. But, gigantic as they are in width and height, yet, beside and in comparison with the vast perpendicular clefts of rocks, they look like daisies beside a tall pine.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed the lady, opening her eyes very wide.

“Yes, madam. There are forty parts in this work, and every part discloses more wonderful resources of California than the preceding one, so that when you have received the whole set you wouldn’t part with it for ten times the price if you couldn’t get a duplicate.”

“But I can buy it any time, can’t I?”

“I’m afraid not. The expense attending the production of a work of this rare character compels a publisher to limit the edition to a certain number of sets. When these have all been sold—and I assure you, madam, they are going very fast indeed—it will not be possible to obtain the work.”

“I think I had better take it now, then,” said the lady, hesitatingly.

“I certainly would advise you to, for the chance may not come again.”

Whereupon she signed the contract Bert produced.

“Much obliged, madam. You are one of the fortunate ones.”

Bert was really interested in the work himself.

He had read the six parts through, word for word, and his enthusiasm on the subject was so real that he com-

municated it to almost every one of the ladies on whom he called.

His descriptions of picturesque California were vivid and alluring.

If he magnified the subject-matter it was solely because he himself believed every word he uttered.

From the moment he opened his mouth until he secured—as he did in most cases—the signature of the person he addressed the listener was fairly carried away by the fascinating power of his eloquence.

And Bert really had no idea of the hypnotic influence he was exercising.

"Why, this is a cinch," he said to himself, when he went to lunch with seven orders in his pocket.

After a good rest he continued his route with renewed zeal.

The first lady he called upon positively declined to look at the sample parts.

"I have too much of that stuff in the house already," she said, with a forbidding smile.

But this reception did not chill Bert for a cent.

"Of course, if you don't care to look at the work it isn't for me to insist that you do so. It would really take but a few minutes for me to exhibit a few of the pictures, for instance, and I confess I should like to do so for the purpose of getting the opinion of a lady of refinement and good taste. I am introducing this work, which, when completed, will form one of the most remarkable and entertaining publications before the public, and it is my opinion your criticism would help me with other ladies not so well informed as yourself."

"Well," replied the lady, impressed by this delicate bit of flattery, "I will look at the pictures if you wish."

"I hope that you will understand that I am not not trying to induce you to subscribe, although I am sure your signature on my book would enable me to sell many copies."

Bert then opened his package, and selecting what he thought was the best of the bunch, began to turn to the illustrations, and with much deference asked the lady to give her opinion on their artistic excellence.

"It is hard work, madam, to have to point out all these things to the average lady, therefore you will understand how refreshing it is to me to meet with some one like yourself, whose culture enables you to see at a glance what it would take me many moments to explain and describe. Now we will take this petrified forest here as an example. It is justly regarded as one of the great natural wonders of California. Portions of nearly one hundred distinct trees, of great size, prostrate and scattered over a tract three or four miles in extent, have been found, some on the surface and others projecting from the mountainside. They are supposed to have been silicified by an eruption of hot alkaline waters containing silica in solution, from the neighboring Mount St. Helena.

"Marvelous!" exclaimed the lady, interested in spite of herself.

"You may well say that, madam. California is over-run with just such remarkable natural productions. Look

at this picture. I am sure you recognize in this the famous Geyser Springs, which are situated in Sonora County, in a lateral gorge of the Napa Valley, called the Devil's Canon, near the Pluton River."

"I have heard of it."

"Certainly you have. But most ladies are not so fortunate. I dare say that you know the approaches to the springs are very impressive, the scenery being finer than anything in the lower Alps."

The lady nodded as if she knew all about it.

"One great advantage of this work to you, madam, would be the benefit you would have in being so well qualified to describe these pictures to your friends when you showed them. Your husband is certainly a fortunate man."

"This seems to be an excellent work. I think I will subscribe for it, after all."

Bert had his stylographic pen between her fingers and the signature book in front of her before the resolution could grow cold; then he packed up and got out as soon as possible.

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN STAGGERBACK.

When Bert reported at the office that afternoon at five o'clock he found nearly a dozen other canvassers on hand awaiting their turn to put in their accounts for the day.

When his turn came he handed his documents to the manager's assistant.

The young man counted a dozen signed orders for "Picturesque California," then looked at Bert and whistled softly.

He walked over to the manager's desk and showed him the result of the new canvasser's first day, which, as it appeared, exceeded the returns of the most experienced man in the firm's employ for the day.

Mr. Prescott, the manager, wheeled about in his chair and asked Bert to come within the railing.

"For a first day's work this is the most remarkable performance that has come under my observation since I've had charge of this department," he said to the lad. "You are either a born crack-a-jack at the business or you've had a most astonishing run of luck. How did you do it?"

"Give it up," smiled Bert innocently. "I simply talked to the ladies for all I was worth, and the books did the rest."

"I didn't expect you to turn in more than three orders at the outside," he said. "You made a phenomenal beginning, and have established a record for a first day with us. I shall be better able to decide upon your ability as a canvasser after you have put in a couple of weeks at it. It's my opinion that you are a comer; however, time will show. I congratulate you on the start you have made, and trust you will keep the ball rolling. If you do you will soon have a bank account."

Bert might have told him that he had one already, for he had deposited his two hundred dollars in the Beehive Savings Institution.

The record made by Bert during his first full week was

so encouraging that both Mr. Prescott, the manager, and Mr. Love, the publisher, were satisfied the boy would soon become a star canvasser.

He kept up the good work right along, and as a consequence his bank account grew steadily, for he acquired no bad habits, though many of his companions in the business, taking a fancy to him on account of his genial, social ways, tried to induce him to adopt their free-and-easy methods of having a good time.

Bert, however, while not acting mean in any way, managed to steer clear of the temptations which constantly assailed him, and put his spare time in to better advantage than haunting barrooms, small gambling resorts, billiard saloons, and such places frequented by his associates.

He joined the Young Men's Christian Association, and spent much time in the library and gymnasium of that institution.

He went to church regularly every Sunday, and tried to deport himself as a Christian young man should do.

The one sorrow of his life was the uncertainty as to the fate of his father.

In spite of the treatment he and his dead mother had received from Edward Hawley during later years, he could not forget that the man, however low he may have sunk, was still his father, and that he had been a kind and considerate parent before adversity soured and warped his disposition and habits.

Mrs. Morgan, the widow lady with whom Bert boarded, had come to like the bright-faced boy very much.

"The nicest boy I ever saw in my life," she assured her friends and acquaintances. "He is so smart and so regular in his habits that he will make a fine man."

Bert, who occupied a small back room, was Mrs. Morgan's only boarder.

The good lady, however, rented her best rooms to lodgers.

About this time the square apartment next to Bert's became vacant; but in a day or so it was taken by a tall, military-looking man, with jet-black eyes, a pair of bushy whiskers, and a gold front tooth.

Bert met him in the hall the day after his arrival, and the boy returned the very polite bow the stranger favored him with.

That evening when Bert came upstairs after supper he noticed the new lodger's door ajar.

Before he could get his room-key out of his pocket the stranger opened his door and, noticing Bert, asked him if he would not come in.

The boy hesitated.

Observing which, the stranger remarked that, being a stranger in Philadelphia, he would take it as a favor if Bert would honor him with his society for a few moments, as he would like some information about the city.

Bert could not very well refuse to oblige the gentleman, and entered his room.

"Sit down, young man. Let me introduce myself. I am Captain Staggerback, of the British Army, and I have

come to America on a business visit, with which I also hope to combine a little pleasure. Your name is——?"

"Bert Hawley."

"Thank you. I am pleased to make your acquaintance. You seem to be a bright young fellow. I presume you are well acquainted with the city?" and the military man fixed the boy with his piercing black eyes.

"Fairly well, sir. I've only been here a little over two months myself."

"Ah, indeed. You are employed, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"What business—may I ask?"

"The subscription book business—our office is on South Ninth street, near Chestnut."

"I brought a letter of introduction to a family on —— street," mentioning one of the most aristocratic neighborhoods in Philadelphia; "but, unfortunately, it was in my pocketbook, with the bulk of my available funds, which was stolen from me in New York the day before yesterday."

"Stolen from you!" exclaimed Bert, in surprise.

"Yes. Actually lifted in a street car—we call them tram cars on the other side," nodded the captain.

"The loss of your pocketbook must have inconvenienced you greatly."

"I am practically strapped, to use an American expression, and shall be obliged to sell several railway bonds I happen to have in my possession, and which I did not expect to dispose of so soon," said the captain, running his fingers through his whiskers.

"You ought to be able to do that without any trouble," remarked Bert.

"Undoubtedly, for they are readily negotiable; but the awkward part of the matter is just this—I am due in Trenton on a business engagement early to-morrow, and will not have time to get to a broker's, and I need one hundred dollars right away. I have a certificate of mining stock for a block of five thousand shares, which I would put up as security for the loan of one hundred dollars for twenty-four hours, and I would pay a handsome bonus for the accommodation. Do you think you could induce the landlady to accommodate me to that extent?"

"I might ask her," said the boy, with some hesitation.

"I wish you would," said the captain glibly. "Tell her I will return her the sum of \$125 to-morrow night. And, now that I think of it, you might do me another favor; and it would be a sort of additional security for the lady should she advance the money in question. I am satisfied that you are an honest boy. I'll entrust you with the sale of five of my one hundred dollar railroad bonds. You can dispose of them at the market rate to some broker near your office and bring the money here to me to-morrow evening. It will rescue me from my financial embarrassment. Will you do this for me?"

"Certainly, if you wish me to," answered Bert, with his customary politeness, not a little surprised that a stranger should repose such confidence in his honesty on so brief and informal an acquaintance.

"Thank you," said the British officer, picking up a small

grip within easy reach and opening it. "Here are the five railway bonds—Canadian Pacific, you see. You can show them to the landlady and tell her you are going to sell them for me to-morrow. Here is the mining stock certificate—the Jumbo mine, of Cripple Creek. I am holding it as an investment. Tell the lady to retain it as security for \$125, which I engage to return her to-morrow night."

If Bert had any misgivings as to the propriety of asking Mrs. Morgan to loan her new lodger one hundred dollars on a security of whose actual value he was ignorant, the possession of the five Canadian Pacific bonds reassured him, and convinced the boy that the British captain was honest in his effort to raise the money he wanted.

But then the boy did not know as much about the captain as he found out later on.

He went downstairs and interviewed the widow, who happened to have the money in the house and was willing to lend it to her lodger on the representations of Bert.

Indeed, she would have let the boy had it on his mere word alone, as she was thoroughly assured of his integrity; but in this case she took the certificate and put it away in a bureau drawer, while Bert carried the money upstairs to the captain.

"I shan't forget this favor," said the gentleman, as he stowed the notes away in his vest pocket. "Will you come out and have a drink with me?"

"Thank you; but that is something I don't indulge in," replied Bert.

"No?" said the captain, raising his eyebrows as if he were surprised. "Perhaps you are right to keep away from it. We military men are accustomed to crooking the elbow with considerable frequency."

"I am opposed to liquor, because I have seen a great deal too much of its evil effects. Some people may stand it all right, but there are others which it brings to ruin."

The boy was thinking of his father.

"I dare say you are correct. Perhaps you don't object to a cigar?"

"I never smoke, either."

"You are quite a model youth," said the gentleman, with an imperceptible sneer.

"I do not claim to be that," answered the boy, respectfully; "but I always do try to do the right thing, as near as I can."

"It's evident my bonds are quite safe in your keeping," said the captain, with a peculiar look.

"You will have no reason to worry on that account," replied Bert, as he bowed himself out of the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH BERT FINDS OUT THAT HE HAS BEEN A CHUMP.

"Where did you get those bonds?" asked the broker on whom Bert called next morning and offered the Canadian Pacific securities for sale.

"They belong to Captain Staggerback, of the British Army, who has taken a room at the place where I board.

He had to go to Trenton early to-day on business, and as he needs the money he asked me to sell them for him."

"Well, we do not purchase bonds unless we have a reasonable assurance that they belong to the person offering them. What is your name?"

"Bert Hawley."

"Where are you employed?"

"With John Love, publisher, No. — South Ninth street."

"How long have you known Captain Staggerback, who you say gave you these bonds to sell?"

"I met him for the first time yesterday."

"Well, I will give you a receipt for these bonds, and send a messenger with you around to your employer. If he will vouch for you I will give you the market price for the securities."

Mr. Love, who had just arrived at the office, told the broker's messenger that Bert was all right; but he asked his young canvasser how he came to get the bonds he wanted to sell.

Bert gave him the gist of his interview the previous evening with Captain Staggerback.

"It may be all right, Bert; but I'm bound to tell you it looks a little bit fishy. It seems to me the captain has had time since the alleged theft of his pocketbook to sell the bonds himself, if he is pressed for cash. The man is an entire stranger to you. He may have stolen the bonds, or got them from the real thief; and if such should happen to be the case he is simply using you as a catspaw to get rid of them without risk to himself."

"Do you really think so?" asked Bert, clearly startled by the supposition.

"I do not assert that it is so, Bert," replied Mr. Love. "But I know such tricks have been worked upon unsuspecting people. I noticed the report of a case almost identical which was printed in the Ledger less than three months ago. I should advise you to be cautious. On the whole, it would be safer for you to tell the captain that the broker refused to deal with any one but the principal. You say the landlady loaned Captain Staggerback one hundred dollars? Well, that ought to carry him over until to-morrow, surely, and then he can go in person and dispose of the securities."

"I think you are right, sir. I don't want to take the risk of getting into any trouble over the bonds."

"That's right. Go back to the broker, ask him for the securities, and return them to the captain. You may tell the broker that I advised you to do this."

Bert hastened to carry out this plan, though he had an idea he should feel a bit ashamed of his caution if everything turned out all right in regard to Captain Staggerback.

A surprise, however, awaited the boy at the broker's.

"We have discovered that these bonds are a part of a batch of securities stolen from a New York banker a week ago," said the money broker, consulting a printed slip he held in his hand. "A detective will be here in a few minutes, to whom you can tell the particulars and furnish as accurate a description as possible of this Captain Staggerback, who, I have no doubt, is a clever crook."

"Good gracious!" gasped Bert.

"Don't be alarmed, young man. We have no doubt of your innocence of any attempt to deceive us. The rascal simply took advantage of your unsuspecting nature."

Bert was staggered to think he had been acting as an agent for a thief, or maybe his accomplice.

"And I thought I was too smart to be taken in by such a game as that," muttered the boy, in a tone of disgust. "I guess I haven't cut my eye teeth yet."

In the course of fifteen minutes the detective appeared, and Bert was subjected to what he considered a most humiliating interview.

"You needn't be so cast down, Hawley," said the detective. "Pretty clever people are fooled every day by the simplest of methods. In fact, the more innocent-looking the scheme the easier they tumble into the trap."

"But I can see a dozen reasons now why I ought to have suspected Captain Staggerback," replied Bert, feeling as if he wished he could have the pleasure of kicking himself.

"That's because you now see the bogus captain in a different light. He simply had you hypnotized last night."

"Hypnotized!"

"It amounted to the same thing, didn't it? He persuaded you to do something which, under ordinary circumstances, your common sense would have stopped you from doing. He talked you into believing he was all he represented himself to be."

"That's what he did," admitted the boy. "He just worked me to the queen's taste, and I hate to think what an easy proposition I was."

"You'll have your revenge after we have landed him in jail and you are called upon to identify him."

"I am afraid Mrs. Morgan is likely to lose the one hundred dollars she loaned him at my request."

"It is probable she will."

"No, she won't," spoke up Bert, with sudden resolution. "I'll pay it back to her myself. She wouldn't have let a comparative stranger like him have so much money on such doubtful security as a certificate of mining stock if I hadn't asked her to and showed these bonds, the proceeds of which I believed would fully secure her in any case. I shall stand the loss as a lesson to be more careful in the future."

"The certificate of mining stock is not mentioned among the securities stolen from the banker. It was either lifted from somebody else or it is worthless. I fancy the latter to be the case, as there is a lot of that kind of stuff floating around."

Mrs. Morgan was very much disturbed when the detective called upon her that morning and opened her eyes as to the true character of her new lodger.

"I ought to have insisted on having a reference when he came here, but he was such a smooth talker and had such a distinguished air that really I was persuaded he was perfectly respectable. So the man is really a thief?" she added, with some indignation, as she thought of how she had been taken in.

"He is certainly what we may call a crook—that is, a

professional criminal, madam," replied the detective. "So he told you he was going to Trenton and would be gone all day?"

"Yes, on business of great importance."

"I imagine he hasn't left the city. He will probably turn up this evening in the expectation of receiving the five hundred dollars, or thereabouts, from the sale of those five bonds. If he does, I shall be on hand to make his acquaintance."

"And do you think I will get that hundred dollars back which I lent him?" asked the widow anxiously, for the loss was a serious one to her.

"I'm afraid there's little chance of that, so far as he is concerned. However, don't worry about it. Your young boarder, Mr. Hawley, told me he intended to make your loss good, as he said it was through him you were induced to part with your money."

"What, Bert?"

"Yes, I think that's his first name."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of taking it from him, sir. He's the nicest young man I ever had in my house—a perfect little gentleman. I don't hold him responsible for it," she answered, with some warmth.

"You must settle that question between you, madam. I think you had better let me see that mining stock certificate."

Widow Morgan got it from her bureau drawer.

"Hum! Five thousand shares, eh? Jumbo Gold and Silver Mining Company, of Cripple Creek. Offices of the company at — Tremont street, Denver, Colo. Handsomely engraved, isn't it, madam—but I don't believe it's worth the paper it's printed on. I'll take this with me and communicate with the Denver authorities. If the company is not a wildcat, as I strongly suspect it is, we shall probably be able to find out if this certificate has been reported to the company as lost or stolen, in which case we will be able to trace its rightful owner."

Captain Staggerback failed to turn up at his lodging place that night, and the detective's presence in the house failed of results.

In fact, nothing further was heard of the so-called captain.

To account for this we may as well inform the reader that the brilliant captain had just been a little too smart to be caught.

Instead of going to Trenton, which had never been his intention, he simply removed his mustache and whiskers, made a few other simple changes in his attire after he left his lodgings that morning, and then waited until Bert came out.

He shadowed the boy down to his place of business, waited until he reappeared on the street, followed him to the broker's, saw him leave that place with a messenger, and then began to scent trouble.

He hung about, however, until Bert returned, and as soon as he saw the boy was detained at the broker's office he was satisfied that the game was up, and he took the first train out for New York.

Bert drew one hundred dollars from his savings bank and insisted on Mrs. Morgan accepting it.

She strongly objected, much as it meant to her; but the boy would not take "no," for an answer, and she finally yielded the point, declaring that Bert was everything that her fancy could picture.

A month later the Jumbo certificate was returned to the widow with the information that there was no evidence that it had been stolen from anybody; that while the miné was a genuine one, the stock had no market value, and had never been quoted at higher than one cent a share when first exploited.

Mrs. Morgan turned it over to Bert, who put it away in the bottom of his trunk as an object lesson for his future guidance.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLIMBING THE LADDER OF SUCCESS.

The Christmas holidays had come around.

By this time Bert Hawley had given the most flattering assurance of his success as a serial book canvasser.

His substantial bank account showed solid evidences of this, as well as the prudent manner in which he had taken care of his income.

He was a shining example of a thrifty and upright young fellow, who always had an eye out for the future and whose character was stable enough to enable him to avoid the many temptations that lie in the way of those whose lot is cast in a big city.

Mr. Love, the publisher, had watched his progress with much interest.

"The boy certainly deserves all the encouragement I can give him," he remarked, on the afternoon of Christmas Eve to his subscription manager, Mr. Prescott, after he had submitted a proposal to that enterprising young gentleman with a view to his concurrence.

"You couldn't do better at the present time," replied Mr. Prescott, nodding his head approvingly. "That boy is a wonder in the business. I don't know exactly how he does it, but I think it is the taking way he has about him that impresses the people with whom he comes in contact. I am sensible myself that he has a large amount of personal magnetism—and that is the best capital a man can have in this line. You are making no mistake, I am sure, in advancing him to the position in question. While he may be lacking in experience, his natural business capacity will to a great extent make up for that. At any rate, it is worth the trial."

And so when Bert returned that afternoon from his day's labor he was told that Mr. Love was waiting to see him in the office.

"It is our practice at the close of the year to make our employes some little acknowledgment of our appreciation of their work during the past twelve months, proportionate to their ability and faithfulness," began the publisher. "It usually takes the form of a sum of money, but in a few cases it means promotion to a better position in our employ. You have been with us but a matter of three months,

and in the natural order of things you would hardly benefit by this custom. But it happens that you have demonstrated an unusual fitness for this business. Such being the case, together with the fact that we have ample evidence of your honesty, reliability, and unexceptionable habits, we desire to show you—an opportunity having occurred that we thoroughly appreciate a capable and conscientious employe. We propose to send you to New York next week to take charge of our agency there, temporarily made vacant by the illness of our resident manager."

To say that Bert was astonished at this proof of Mr. Love's confidence would be putting it quite mild.

He was completely tongue-tied for the moment, and could only sit and stare—in what he afterward recalled to be a very foolish fashion—at the head of the house.

"I trust you have no objection to falling in with the views we have formed for your advancement in our service?" said the publisher, with a smile.

"I hardly know what to say, sir," began Bert, with a hesitation unusual with him. "Of course I feel both gratified and delighted with the idea of getting ahead in business; but I am not sure I am quite competent, after so short an experience, to fulfil the expectations you have probably formed of my ability to fill the position."

"I don't think you need worry about that, Bert," returned Mr. Love, with a reassuring smile. "We don't often make a mistake in our estimate of our employes. It is true you have been with us but a short time, but it has been long enough to show what your capabilities are in our line. Some men never get beyond a certain mark. They may be as faithful and conscientious as you are, but, unfortunately for themselves, they possess no unusual talent, and that is something which must be born in the man. You, on the other hand, show a latent capacity which needs only the opportunity for it to develop itself. It would be hard for me to prophesy just what your limit is. The world is overcrowded with average men; but the individual who can earn \$10,000 a year and over is not so common, and I may say is always in demand. You might think there are a lot of such men in America to-day when you look at the handsome houses in all our big cities which only a rich man can afford to live in. But compare them in number with the masses who labor for a mere pittance and then you will begin to understand what I mean."

Bert listened to the foregoing very truthful statement with respectful attention, assuming that Mr. Love's remarks must be based on facts.

"And now, Bert," concluded the publisher, "I presume you accept this promotion we offer you?"

"Certainly, sir. If you are satisfied to try me in so responsible a position, I can only say that I am deeply grateful to you for the opening and that I will do the very best that lies in me to merit your confidence."

"We are fully satisfied of that, Bert. You may therefore make your preparations for moving to New York, for a time, at least. Mr. Prescott will give you such instructions as he thinks necessary."

Mr. Love then stated what Bert's salary and commission

would be in his new position, and the financial possibilities of the agency rather surprised the boy.

He began to see visions of a swell bank account.

"That will be all now. I congratulate you on the advancement and wish you a Merry Christmas."

"And I wish you the same, Mr. Love, and thank you sincerely for the promotion."

Mrs. Morgan was very sorry, indeed, to lose Bert.

She had grown attached to the lad, who brought a genial glow into the modest little home every time he entered it.

"I am very glad to know you are succeeding so well in business, Bert. I couldn't feel more interested in you if you were really my own son," said the good lady, wiping the tears from her eyes. "I shall miss you very much indeed. You were such good company for me, and I have been building hopes on your passing the winter evenings in our dining-room, which would have been all the brighter for your presence. But we can't always have things as we would wish them in this world. You must write to me often, Bert. I want to know how you are getting on and how you like New York, which is a bigger and, if I must say it, a much more wicked city than Philadelphia. I have heard some awful stories of that place, and our newspapers always seem to have some story of a crime committed in New York. I almost tremble to think of you going there as a stranger. You will be careful of yourself, won't you, Bert?"

The boy assured her that he would keep a bright lookout against the snares constantly set for the feet of the unwary.

The day after New Year's Bert took an early train over the Pennsylvania road, arriving in Jersey City about ten o'clock.

He crossed the Hudson by the Desbrosses Street ferry, which landed him within a short distance of Canal street.

Boarding a car, he rode to Broadway, down which street he had only a block or so to walk, for the agency of John Love, the publisher, was on the third floor of a Broadway building.

The young man in charge had been duly advised of his coming, and welcomed him with great politeness; but he undoubtedly was surprised at the youthfulness of his new principal.

Bert spent the greater part of the day getting in touch with the methods of his predecessor and with the general run of work of the branch.

He left early to look up a boarding-place in a part of the city recommended by his chief assistant.

He found what he judged would suit him in Madison avenue, near Forty-second street, and going to a transfer company on Broadway near Twenty-third street, left the check of his trunk and ordered it to be delivered to his new home.

Bert found New York to be a lively town, with no lack of amusements at night.

He had heard a great deal about that sprightly region known as the Tenderloin, and was rather surprised to find

that a portion of upper Broadway was included within its limits.

Before he was long in New York he found that the Tenderloin was not necessarily dangerous to a man content to view it from the surface.

This encouraged him to take in the famous Bowery, which, however, is but a mere shadow now of what it once was.

His office assistant accompanied him on this trip, which began with a visit to the Thalia theater, where he saw a popular young actor in a good play, and he enjoyed the performance exceedingly.

At the first opportunity, as the quickest way of seeing the sights of New York, he invested a couple of dollars in a trip on one of the big automobiles, which toured the city from Twenty-third street down, and felt that his time was not wasted.

Although he liked to take in a theater occasionally, he enjoyed his visits to the Academy of Design, on Fourth avenue; also the Museum of Arts and Sciences and the Museum of Natural History in the upper part of the city.

One thing that particularly pleased him was that the main building of the Y. M. C. A. was located within a couple of blocks of his boarding house, and he lost no time in connecting himself with it, having a letter of introduction from the secretary of the Philadelphia institution.

Bert's management of the New York branch of John Love gave every satisfaction at the home office, and he received occasional letters of encouragement and commendation from both Mr. Love and Mr. Prescott.

His predecessor had gone to Florida, and there seemed to be no immediate prospect that his failing health would permit him to return and resume the reins of government on Broadway, so that Bert had every chance of remaining a fixture.

He introduced improvements in the canvass which enlarged the business, and this, of course, made a corresponding increase in his income.

Everything was going on swimmingly, and the boy was as happy as a young fellow of his age and vigorous health could well be, when something occurred—as unexpected as a flash of lightning from a clear sky—which almost brought his prosperous career to an untimely close.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES.

"Why, Bert Hawley, is it possible this is you?"

It was the silvery voice of a very pretty girl of sixteen, charmingly attired, who had just stepped out of the private entrance of the Hotel Normandie.

The hour was eight in the evening, and the young lady, who was accompanied by a dudish young fellow one year her senior, was evidently bound for some place of amusement.

Bert, who had the air of a prosperous New Yorker, turned in great surprise and recognized Helen Potts.

"Miss Helen!" he exclaimed, seizing her hand with undoubted warmth.

"Are you really glad to see me?" the girl asked, with a shy demureness that well became her.

"Am I? Can you doubt it?" he asked, with an earnest eagerness that could not be mistaken.

"No, I don't doubt it, you ridiculous boy!" Then she stopped in some embarrassment, for she now recognized the fact that Bert was a different looking boy to what he was the last time she had seen him on the morning of his departure from Jayville. "Why, how well you look!" she added, in a confused way.

"Do I?" said Bert. "I'm glad you think so."

"Why, you look ever so prosperous, and," with a blush, "just too handsome for anything."

"I'm afraid you're laughing at me, Miss Helen."

"Not at all. I meant what I said. Have you made your fortune already?"

"Well, hardly," smiled Bert; "but I am bound to say I am getting along very nicely."

"Jonas," she said, turning to her brother, who stood impatiently aside chewing the head of his dapper little cane, "haven't you anything to say to Bert Hawley?"

Young Potts stared at Bert and, then nodded superciliously.

He had observed that the boy he had never liked was well dressed and looked a bit up in the world, as compared with what he had been in Jayville; but for all that he wasn't quite prepared to admit that Bert was anywhere near as important in the world as himself.

The fact that his father, Lawyer Potts, had recently made a good deal of money from some fortunate investment had caused Jonas to "feel his oats" more than ever.

"We were just going to the Hippodrome. Couldn't I persuade you to walk just a little way with us?" asked Helen, with a glance at Bert which carried the boy into the seventh heaven of delight, for if there was one person in the wide world Bert thought an awful lot of, that person was Helen Potts.

"I will be pleased to do so," he answered with alacrity.

Jonas turned up his nose; but his displeasure did not count, and the three young people, all natives of Jayville, Va., started off together.

"I'm just dying to hear all the news. I don't know what I ought to do with you, Bert," bubbled Helen Potts; "you haven't written half as regularly as you promised to do. The last I heard from you, you were in Philadelphia selling books—I think that is what you said you were doing. Have you given that up?"

"Not exactly," replied the boy. "I have been promoted. But I wrote you all about my good luck a week after I came to New York," he added, in surprise.

"I'm sure I didn't get your letter, then, for I am entirely in the dark as to your having come to this city. When did you come?"

"At the first of the year."

"Is it possible! And this is May. When I didn't hear from you for so long a time I began to fear that either something had happened to you or that you had found some young lady you liked better than me," with an arch look.

"That can never be, Miss Helen," responded Bert, gravely.

"You ridiculous—I beg your pardon," blushing, "you really must excuse my——"

"There is nothing to excuse, Miss Helen. If you will only continue to treat me in the same old way it will give me great pleasure."

"You are very kind to say that, Bert. Perhaps I ought to call you Mr. Hawley now, but——"

"I hope you won't," he answered hastily.

"Well, I won't if you really prefer that I should not."

"I much prefer, Bert—from you."

She blushed again and did not say anything more for a moment or two; then her embarrassment wore off and they were soon chatting gaily.

At length they arrived at the Hippodrome.

"I wish you would come in," she said, with some earnestness. "Don't you think you could get a seat next to us?"

"I'm afraid not. The only chance would be to make an exchange with a speculator; but I have no right to ask you to do that."

"If you could get three seats together I should very much prefer to have you get them. Jonas, hand our tickets to Bert."

Jonas did so grudgingly, for he saw his sister would not be denied.

By the payment of a couple of dollars Bert exchanged the reserved seats for three others similarly situated, and the young couple entered the place of amusement.

I am afraid the show, delightful as it was, was less enjoyed by Helen and Bert than the fact that they were in one another's company.

At length the performance was over and they came out of the house.

A tall, dark-complexioned man, with piercing black eyes and a slight mustache, who was watching the audience disperse, noticed Bert, and gave a slight start.

Then he walked briskly up to the three young people and said:

"Have a carriage?"

Bert was about to refuse, when Jonas said:

"How much for two to the Hotel Normandie?"

"Two," said the dark man, glancing at each rapidly.

"You mean three, Jonas," interposed his sister.

"Fifty cents apiece," said the man quickly, leading the way toward a "night owl" which was standing a few steps away.

Jonas gave a snort, for his plan to separate his sister from Bert had been nipped in the bud.

Had Bert been better acquainted with New York he certainly would have hesitated entrusting himself and companions to a "night owl" carriage, for they have a shady reputation. But, as it was, he did not happen to be up to snuff in this particular, and so permitted the man, at whom he had merely glanced, to hand them all into the carriage and shut the door with a bang.

The dark-complexioned man then mounted beside the

driver, whispered in his ear, and in another moment the vehicle drove away from the curb.

The cab proceeded rapidly down Sixth avenue for several blocks and then turned into a side street toward the east.

Jonas was the first to notice that the vehicle was taking an uncommonly long time to reach the hotel, although it was going at a smart rate.

So he pushed open the door and shouted to the driver.

The jehu presently pulled up near the curb and the dark man descended from his perch.

"I say, where are you taking us to?" asked Jonas, putting his foot on the carriage step.

"Hotel Normandie," replied the man. "Isn't that where you want to go?"

"Yes; but——"

The words were choked back by the jerk he received as he was landed on the sidewalk.

"Hand over your watch and money!" cried his assailant, in a low, tense tone, "or I'll blow the whole top of your scone off," and Jonas felt the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against his temple.

The driver, in the meantime, had descended on the opposite side, and opening the other door, held Bert and Helen spellbound with a big bulldog revolver, which he swore he'd use if they uttered a sound.

The dark-featured man was about to turn on Bert when a policeman suddenly appeared, running from the opposite side of the street.

"Ware hawk!" exclaimed the driver, slamming the carriage door and leaping to his seat.

The accomplice was quick to take the alarm.

He pushed Jonas away, jumped into the hack, and slammed the door just as the driver lashed his animal into a run.

The policeman, seeing he was too late, pounded on the pavement with his nightstick and started full run after the fleeing vehicle.

While this was going on Bert had recovered his presence of mind and grappled with the man who had entered the cab.

The boy was no easy proposition to handle.

Months of hard farm work and subsequent intelligent gymnastic practice had given him muscles of steel.

But he soon found he was at a great disadvantage in the close, swaying cab, which inconvenience did not seem to bother his companion half as much.

The struggle, while it lasted, was fierce enough, Helen looking on half dazed with fear.

The dark man brought matters to a sudden crisis by pulling out a slungshot and cracking the boy on the skull with it.

Such a weapon might easily have inflicted a fatal wound only for the inability of the person who used it to strike out with much strength in the confined space of the cab.

The effect was sufficient, however, to effectually stun Bert, and he fell limply back on the cushions.

At this Helen gave one piercing scream and fainted.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW BERT FOUND HIS FATHER.—CONCLUSION.

When Bert recovered his senses he found himself in a dark, noisome place, which had all the appearance of a cellar.

There was not a single aperture in the walls to admit either light or air from the outside.

On a beer barrel standing in the middle of the floor was a lighted candle-end stuck between three nails that pierced a piece of wood.

It served hardly more than to make darkness visible.

"For heaven's sake, where am I?" he exclaimed in surprise, as he raised himself on one elbow.

Then recollection asserted itself and the struggle in the cab flashed through his mind.

"Where have they taken me and what do they mean to do with me?"

Of course these were conundrums he could not solve.

"And Helen—what have they done with her?"

This reflection was more distressing to him than the contemplation of his own condition.

While he was considering these matters the door which opened into the place moved on its hinges, and a man entered.

It was the tall, dark man with the mustache and black eyes.

"Woke up, have you?" he said to Bert, with a peculiar smile which exposed a large gold tooth in the center of his mouth.

He stood near the candle, and the boy had a good view of him.

"Captain Staggerback!" he gasped.

"Ho! I see you know me, after all," grinned the bogus officer.

"You attacked me in the cab last night."

"Yes; and a rather tough proposition you were. I had to give you a clip over the head to quiet you."

"You got the best of me, that's evident. What did you do with the young lady?" Bert asked, anxiously.

"You needn't worry about her. She's all right."

"How am I to know that?"

"Never you mind. I've something more important than her to talk about. I want that certificate of mining stock I let you have to raise one hundred dollars for me from your landlady in Philadelphia. I've found out that she gave it to you. Tell me where you live, and give me an order to be admitted to your room during your absence, and when the certificate is in my hands we'll let you go."

This was certainly a proposition the boy did not care to agree to.

The mining certificate had amounted to nothing, it is true; but he did not propose to give this crook a chance to go through his trunk and room and take all he possessed.

"You must think I'm a fool," replied Bert, in a decided tone.

"You'll certainly prove yourself one if you don't accede to my demand," said the fictitious Captain Staggerback.

Bert remained silent.

At that moment another man, rough and unshaven, slouched into the cellar.

One glance at him, and Bert gave a shudder of apprehension.

The newcomer was Rake.

"I reckon I've got you this time where you can't give me the slip," he said, in an ugly, threatening voice. "You have done me up twice, and I'm thinkin' it's my turn this trip."

"Pshaw! You're not going to touch him if he gives us that certificate of mining stock," said the tall man hastily, favoring Rake with a wink which Bert observed.

"All right, pardner, if you say so," growled Rake, with a malevolent grin. "But I'll reach him another time, all right."

But Bert readily perceived that the bogus captain had no intention of keeping faith with him, supposing he did agree to put him on the scent of the certificate, which the boy believed to be merely a ruse to enable the fellow to get into his boarding-house without suspicion, when he would probably try to make a clean sweep of the place.

"Are you going to write that note to your landlady that I asked for?" asked the big crook, producing a fountain pen and a blank card from one of his pockets.

"Supposing I won't write it—what then?" answered Bert, aggressively.

"I reckon if you don't write it you'll go into the sewer," said Rake, coarsely.

"The sewer!" exclaimed the boy.

"That's what I said—the sewer."

"P'raps you have your doubts about it, eh?" chuckled the dark rascal. "Well, we'll let you have a peep at it. It runs under this building, and it's a mighty handy thing to have around when you want to get rid of a body."

The crook bent down, seized a ring in the floor, and raised a trap door.

A strong odor immediately filled the place.

"Fetch him over, Rake, while I hold the light."

Rake lost no time in getting a firm grip on Bert, and then dragged him over to the aperture.

"Now look down, and you'll see what's waiting for you, unless you write out that little document."

With these words he let the trap fall back into its place again and regarded the horror-stricken boy in triumph.

Bert believed they intended to do away with him in any case, for he knew Rake's feelings toward him were particularly bitter and that he thirsted for revenge.

He felt there was little hope for escape, and that unless God intervened in his behalf he was doomed.

"Yer wanted upstairs, cullies," said a voice, at this juncture.

Three pairs of eyes instantly turned toward the door.

There stood a youthful specimen of moral depravity with the butt of a cigar thrust between his teeth.

"All right," returned the dark man, impatiently, and the youth disappeared.

"We'll give you a few minutes to think the thing over," grinned the crook to Bert. "All we want is the certificate, which is valuable to us, though not worth as much as your life to you. As soon as we get it we're going to let you go."

The two scoundrels passed through the secured door, leaving the boy to very bitter reflections, indeed.

He saw nothing but a horrible death before him.

"But I shan't die without an effort to save myself," he said desperately.

He sprang to the door, and found it was barred as securely as he had supposed it was.

Taking the flickering candle, he hurriedly examined the four walls of the cellar as a forlorn hope.

Not a break was to be seen, not even a single displaced brick.

But he found an iron bar standing in one corner which had once upon a time been used to secure a window shutter.

It was a formidable weapon in the hands of a desperate person.

"At least I will sell my life dearly!" cried Bert, as he seized upon the bar.

At that moment he heard sounds at the door, as if his enemies had returned.

Stationing himself so that when the door was pushed open it would conceal him for a moment, Bert waited.

The key was turned in the lock, and the person who entered was Rake, and he was alone.

He held the card and stylographic pen in one hand, and his mission was evident.

Bert darted upon him and brought the bar down with a force that stretched the ruffian on the floor.

Then he sprang through the opening, and shut and locked the door, putting the key in his pocket.

He was now in a narrow, littered passage as dark as the caves of Erebus.

Feeling his way along the rough stone wall, he at length stumbled against a rude wooden stairway which led to the upper region.

As he mounted this his ears were saluted with sounds of noisy conversation, deadened by the wall of the passage above.

The dim light of day filtered through a dirty cobwebbed window at the end of the passage.

At the other end was a door, which looked as if it communicated with the street.

"If I can reach that door unobserved," thought Bert, eagerly, "I may be able to make my escape."

With no one in sight this did not present much difficulty, but when he laid his hand on the knob he found the door locked, and there was no key.

"Hard luck!" muttered the boy, a sense of keen disappointment assailing him.

There were two other doors, but both led into the rooms whence the babel of voices issued, and which, from the clinking of glasses, he rightly judged to be a barroom.

"What shall I do?" he murmured. "Perhaps the stairs

to the second floor will answer my purpose, and from one of the rooms up there I can drop to the street."

He turned to carry out this plan, when suddenly the door nearest to him opened, and he stood face to face with his other enemy—the so-called Captain Staggerback.

The recognition was mutual, and for an instant surprise held them motionless.

Then they grappled.

But this time the advantage was with the boy.

Besides, he felt he was fighting for his life, and this added strength and desperate energy to his sinewy arms.

He tore himself from the other's grasp, struck him a heavy blow on the face and sprang up the stairway.

The crook recovered himself and followed at once.

Bert dashed open the first door he came to and rushed into the room.

A well-built man lying on a bed sprang to the floor and confronted him.

It was a desperate moment for the boy, and then—he recognized his father.

"Bert—my son!" ejaculated the man in amazement.

"Father!"

Then the door flew open again and the crook entered with flaming eyes.

"Hold that boy!" he exclaimed, seeing the position of the parties in the room.

"This is my son," replied Edward Hawley, swelling up to his six feet of bone and sinew and interposing between the two. "What do you want with him?"

"Your son!" gasped the rascal, staggered by this unexpected state of affairs.

"Yes, and thank God. I've found him again. Bert, my dear boy, will you own your father? I am no longer the wreck and drunkard I once was, but a man freed forever, thank the Almighty, from the slavery of rum and the temptation of crime."

"Oh, father, is this really so?" cried the boy, joyfully.

"It is."

Bert, careless of the danger he was fleeing from, and confident that he could now depend upon his father's strong arm for protection, embraced his parent.

The crook, nonplussed, stood back in sullen disappointment.

There were many reasons why he did not care to attack this man—his known strength, and his reputation in the tough neighborhood, where he had come to be much respected because of his efforts to save men from the effects of drink and crime.

"We must leave here at once, father," said Bert, earnestly.

To this Ed Hawley agreed, and the pseudo Captain Staggerback was unable to prevent their departure.

At the nearest telephone station Bert communicated with the Hotel Normandie, and found, to his great relief, that Helen Potts had been returned to the hotel after midnight, but, as he subsequently learned, without her watch, earrings and pocketbook.

Bert took his father to his room, and there the strangely

reunited pair had a long and earnest talk together, in which each told the other his experiences since they parted in Jayville months before.

After the attempted robbery of Lemuel Potts' house Edward Hawley, in terror of arrest, fled to Baltimore, and thence made his way to New York City, where he relapsed into a succession of sprees.

The effect of this course, added to past excesses, brought on an attack of delirium tremens, and Hawley nearly died in the alcoholic ward of Bellevue Hospital.

This, with what he saw in Bellevue during the time he was there, worked a reformation in his habits, and, not being a bad man at heart, he resolved not only to switch off from drink for good, but to devote his life to the rescue of those who were fast going the road to perdition which he himself had so narrowly missed.

So he took to the slums for that purpose.

After Edward Hawley had learned of his son's business success the boy told him the whole story of his last and nearly fatal adventure, in which the man Rake had figured once again.

"What about this mining certificate these crooks are so anxious to get hold of?" asked his father.

"It is worthless," replied Bert, and then he explained how it had come into his possession.

"If I were you I'd investigate it. It might be worth something after all," suggested his father.

Bert had no faith in this idea, but was finally persuaded to look the matter up.

Much to his surprise, he found that the mine had recently turned out a winner, a cave-in on the property having revealed an unexpected vein of gold ore of great value.

In the end Bert sold his stock for one dollar a share, realizing the sum of five thousand dollars.

But this good fortune did not come to him until many months later, after he had been fully established as resident manager of the New York branch of the John Love publishing business through the death in Florida of the former manager.

To-day Bert lives in a fine house in the Bronx, and a charming young wife, who was Helen Potts, of Jayville, Va., presides over it; and his father, whom he made his assistant manager, lives with him and proudly points to his son as a bright example of one of America's self-made boys.

THE END.

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" 3.—A Corner in Corn; or, How a Chicago Boy Did the Trick	- - - -	" " 20th
" 4.—A Game of Chance; or, The Boy Who Won Out	- - - -	" " 27th
" 5.—Hard to Beat; or, The Cleverest Boy in Wall Street	- - - -	" Nov. 3rd
" 6.—Building a Railroad; or, The Young Contractors of Lakeview	- - - -	" " 10th
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